



John Dunn's Jumbunna: All good things must come to an end

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Thomas Tabor on the enduring appeal of Dirty Harry's .44 Magnum



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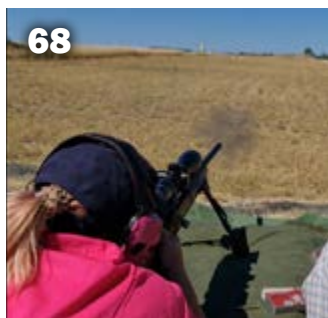
Our February edition brings the launch of a new monthly series - The Hunter's Mancave - in which some of our regular contributors look back fondly at their most treasured mementoes and how their collections came to be. Kicking things off is Sam Garro who offers 'Something of value to hand down'.

In the first of a two-part special, seasoned rifleman Mark van den Boogaart will look at demystifying rifle stocks for the uninitiated. He'll tell you all you need to know and look at your best option be it for hunting or target shooting while also addressing the various coatings and finishes available.

Steyr Arms have taken sporting firearm design to the next level with their new Monobloc rifle which, as the name suggests, has the receiver and barrel made from a single piece of steel and which our reviewer reckons is "designed for the hunter who demands the best combined with class in a switch-barrel rifle platform".



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Our 212,00-plus membership has taken comfort this year in returning to the things they love most - target shooting and hunting. Yet lingering memories of the pandemic forcing state and territory branches to shut down our ranges, suspending international competition and wreaking havoc in terms of supply chains is still fresh in our minds but thankfully the SSAA flag is once again flying nationwide and our hunters are able to resume their important role in conservation and management without restrictions.

And on the subject of hunting and conservation, this year marked the 30-year anniversary of the SSAA's Conservation & Wildlife Management Program. Our hunters have pioneered the importance of pest animal management through hunting and underlined their passion for all manner of crucial conservation and land management duties in the public arena. The CWM is now a true 'feather in the cap' of the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia's state and territory branches, with the achievements of our members making a real difference to the country's natural landscapes.

Accolades continued to flow for SSAA National's print output this year with the highly-acclaimed *Great Australian Outdoors* magazine and *Field to Fork - Second Helpings* cookbook further cementing the respective positions these publications hold in education and entertainment Australia-wide. Most recently both were announced as finalists in the 2021/22 Real Media Awards in recognition of their effectiveness, creativity and innovation in print. *Field to Fork - Second Helpings* was also celebrated as one of the Best in World meat cookbook titles at the 27th Gourmand World Cookbook Awards earlier this year.

In the advocacy and politics arena, SSAA National was happy to throw its considerable support behind Shooting Australia's bid to have target shooting included in the Victoria 2026 Commonwealth Games. SSAA's 212,000-plus state and territory members across Australia form a significant portion of the target shooting community in this coun-



Man in Canberra: Dan Repacholi...
see page 71.

try, with a number of notable elite shooters such as Laetisha Scanlan, James Willett, Katarina Kowplos and Dan Repacholi (see Page 71) hailing from our ranks. The campaign proved successful with shooting to be included in the 2026 showpiece so we can now look forward to the action being right on our doorstep.

SSAA National Wildlife Programs leader Matthew Godson has spearheaded groundbreaking research which helped secure a quail hunting season for South Australia and provide a scientifically supported research case for sustainable hunting for the rest of the nation. He was also able to take the discussion of sustainable harvesting of duck and quail into the global arena by sharing research to the World Forum on Shooting Activities annual conference of more than 44 hunting, shooting and industry associations.

So in summary we can look back on 2022 as a year of both change and achievement. Here's wishing all our members, readers and advertisers a safe and enjoyable holiday period and we look forward to seeing you at the range or in the field in 2023. Happy Christmas!

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Above and beyond

THE LEUPOLD 6.5-20x40 Target Scope fitted to our club .308 F Class rifle at Werribee Rifle Club recently had a total elevation failure (I suspected the erector spring opposite the elevation knob had failed). The scope's an older model but well looked after and had replaced a Chinese-made one of a long-standing brand in Australia which had completely failed internally.

With confidence I sent the Leupold to NIOA for repair as I'd previously had the knobs on an old 1970s 10x replaced with target knobs and was pleased with the service. The 6.5 came back in the post with a description of the work carried out including the fitting of a new erector spring and rebuild of the parallax adjustment all free of charge, not even postage. It's now as good as new (the Australian office of the Chinese-made scope never replied to my email).

I want to express my thanks for the customer service from NIOA and Leupold - the support provided by Leupold for its products is outstanding and gives me confidence to prefer their scopes for my rifles.

Geoff Morsby, President, Werribee Rifle Club

Milne Bay remembered

I thoroughly enjoyed Chris Redlich's story about his grandfather's experience at Milne Bay in 1942 (*Shooter*, August 2022). My father Jack Robinson was also a member of the 61st Battalion militia regiment and was a sergeant. The Battle of Milne Bay was sadly overshadowed by the Kokoda and Guadalcanal conflicts around the same time, yet it was the first time in WWII that Japanese land forces had been defeated in battle.

Dad rarely spoke about his war experiences but told me at Milne Bay he had a Thompson sub-machinegun and didn't take his boots off for 35 days. Sometime after the battle he was repatriated to Australia with a severe case of malaria but went back to New Guinea after recovering. He sadly died aged just 47 following complications from tropical health issues arising from his military service.

I have another personal connection to the battle as dad's lieutenant was Crawford Tomlinson (who Chris's grandfather would've known). He and dad were taking cover from Japanese machinegun fire when Tommo asked about my imminent birth due early in 1943 and, knowing it was a boy, had a name been chosen. Just then a

Japanese bullet ricocheted off dad's helmet and hit Tommo in the arm. He said: "You just shot me Robbo! You better name your son after me." Hence my middle name is Crawford. For those interested, as most of the Australians in the 61st Battalion were Queenslanders, a Milne Bay Memorial and Research Centre is located at Chermside in Brisbane.

John Robinson, via email

- I absolutely loved Chris Redlich's article on the Japanese invasion of Milne Bay. We need more articles like this to remind young Australians and help them understand the enormous sacrifices our armed forces made to save this country in 1942 because it may not be too long before history will be repeated. Let's hope we have forward-thinking people to pre-plan for that eventuality.

Bill Purvis, via email

- Several other readers have written to express their enjoyment of Chris's article - Ed.

Insurance Q&A

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Q I feel I've been unfairly denied an insurance claim in the past and want to ensure this doesn't happen again. What's the best way to go about this?

A There are several options if you feel you've been unfairly denied a claim and an insurance broker can help manage the process and use their expertise. The problem most people run into in this situa-

tion is understanding their rights during the claims process. A broker is well-versed in the insurance claims process, with account managers they can contact and advocate to on your behalf before you reach the point where a claim is dismissed.

Submitting an insurance claim with a broker on your team ensures we follow up on your behalf and keep the process moving. Our involvement takes some of the

load off you when you're already dealing with a stressful situation which gives you peace of mind that someone's on your side during the claims process. Visit ssaaib.com.au or call 08 8332 0281 for more information.

No rush to go lead-free for sambar hunting in Australia

A new study published by CSIRO Publishing in *Wildlife Research* has compared the performance of lead-based and lead-free bullets for shooting sambar deer, the authors of the study doing so in apparent response to the toxic health threats posed by lead and a current focus on transitioning to lead-free bullets for the shooting of wild animals.

While I haven't seen a need for transitioning to lead-free in Australia due to our vast space and low concentrations of hunting compared to overseas, it seems isolated incidents and a thirst for academic exposure in this research space are creating a local focus. There are other activities and industries which produce much higher environmental impacts than the low-hanging fruit that is lead-based hunting projectiles.

This particular study aimed to quantify the killing efficiency and animal welfare outcomes of lead-based and lead-free (copper-based) bullets for the ground-based shooting of sambar deer (the study was conducted in Victoria during 2020-21). They collected data from recreational shooters who hunted during the day and professional shooters who culled deer at night and asked shooters to record rifle calibre, cartridge type, bullet mass and type, shooting outcomes (miss, wound or kill), shooting distance, where the deer were struck by bullets, frequency of bullet exit wounds and flight distance.

Flight distance was the distance between where the animal was shot and where it died and came to rest, this assumed as a positive correlate of time to incapacitation

and used as the response variable. To examine the role of several predictor variables (including bullet type) potentially influencing flight distance, the authors reduced the dataset to only those deer killed with a single thoracic (chest) shot.

Data was collected from shooting events involving 276 deer. Shooters shot 124 deer with lead-based and 152 with copper-based bullets and it was found most (87 per cent) of deer were killed with a single shot, the frequency of non-fatal wounding being less than four per cent for both bullet types. The authors found there was no distinct difference in the probability of a single-shot kill for deer shot with either bullet type and for those killed with a single chest shot (198), they found no evidence to suggest bullet energy or shooting distance influenced flight distance. After accounting for differences in terminal kinetic energy, the mean flight distance of deer shot with lead-free bullets (35m) was 56 per cent greater than that of deer shot with lead-based bullets (22m).

The authors concluded lead-based and lead-free bullets produced similar animal welfare outcomes for shooting sambar deer, the implications of this study suggesting a transition to lead-free ammunition for shooting sambar deer would have minimal impact on efficiency or animal welfare outcomes.

While the study does address some concerns about negative animal welfare outcomes using lead-free ammunition the fact is in Australia, lead-free ammunition is expensive and in limited supply with



inadequate options available. Until price and product parity with current lead-based ammunition are achieved, any mandate for lead-free ammunition should be solely targeted towards professional culling operations, especially aerial culling where multiple shots are required on target animals.

With the wide variety of brands, models, calibres, barrel twist rates etc in firearms in recreational hunters' hands, we certainly need many more ammunition options to ensure we can find the best cartridge which provides optimum accuracy for our specific firearms and until then it would be unfair to regulate the use of expensive lead-free bullets for recreational hunting. With Australia's wide-open spaces and very low density hunting, there are certainly other environmental impacts that deserve to be picked off first. View the full report at Wildlife Research - <https://doi.org/10.1071/WR22099>

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Beware a blast from the past

This year has meant many things to many people but for me the rhythm has been set by the 80th anniversary of the events of 1942, the year in World War Two that woke-up Australia to the harsh reality of global struggles for regional influence unfolding on our doorstep. The first bombing of Darwin, Battle of the Coral Sea, Japanese landings on the Australian territories of New Guinea, Papua and Nauru, the loss of Kokoda, Battle of Milne Bay, re-taking of Kokoda and numerous skirmishes in between. Indeed this month marks the anniversary of the battles of Buna, Gona and Sanananda which were the bloodiest of the entire Kokoda campaign.

And the legacy of warfare lives on today within our region. Recently there have been news reports from Nauru, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea highlighting the injury, maiming and/or killing of local people by unexploded ordnance otherwise known as UXO, military ammunition or explosive ordnance which has failed to function as designed. Think grenades, mortars and artillery such as bombs and rockets dropped and fired from planes or naval ordnance the size of compressed Volkswagens. During WWII the failure rate of such munitions could be as high as one in three which is a lot of 'bang' lying around after the battles ended. Some battlegrounds have since been reclaimed by locals as residential areas, ports or farmland.

But don't be fooled into thinking the threat of UXO only exists 'way over there' as it also occurs here in Australia. Consider old training bases, airfields and testing sites dotted around the country - these places are now dairies, orchards, state forests, national parks, residential suburbs and more and they exist in every Australian state and territory. For example a cattle property in Queensland where I hunt red deer was a training base during WWII and also used by the local militia unit between WWI and WWII. Even today you can see WWI-style trenches etched into the terrain and find the occasional corkscrew barbed wire picket in the grass.

Another example is Bathurst in NSW which was an infantry training camp for both WWI and WWII. A few years ago on a local sheep property a couple were busting bunnies when they found a grenade which one of them picked up and put in the car. The other didn't want a bar of it so took it out, threw it away and you guessed it, the thing blew up and shattered one of the couple's ankles.

The Atherton Tablelands in Queensland are renowned for UXO finds and nearer the coast farmers still unearth mortar bombs filled with mustard gas from time-to-time. That's right, a chemical warfare agent. Hinchinbrook Island is a national park now but in WWII planes dropped bombs filled with all kinds of nasties just to see how they'd fare in the mangroves and jungle.



When you start to look closer there are far more places like this than you probably imagined, including old airfields and ammo dumps scattered across the Top End and hundreds of former military training areas and practice ranges strewn across the country. Even the rifle range you use on the weekend may have been an army training ground when your granddad was a boy.

Which all goes to show that knowing the history of the places you hunt and enjoy recreational activities is actually important. For example if you have a penchant for gold detecting you never know what you might dig up, now think about what you have in your first-aid-kit. The bottom line is if you find UXO do not pick it up under any circumstances, report it to the police and they'll arrange for an explosives team to remove it safely or destroy it in place. If you'd like to know more visit www.defence.gov.au/UXO





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Q I'm keen to hear your views on the shooting program that's been announced for the 2026 Victorian Commonwealth Games.

Robert Chambers, Vic

A I guess there are two ways to look at this. There was a possibility that shooting would be omitted entirely from the 2026 Commonwealth Games. This year, as I am sure you're fully aware, Birmingham scrapped the entire shooting program so if you look at it from that perspective, to have some firearms events reinstated is a massive win for us.

I'm not sure how the decision was made as to which disciplines were 'in' and 'out' but if you're a full bore shooter you have every right to feel abandoned as this was one of the most popular and traditional events on the Commonwealth Games calendar and on a personal level I'm shocked it didn't receive the go-ahead for Victoria. All rimfire disciplines in rifle and pistol have also been overlooked as have half the shotgun events including Skeet. For an aspiring competitor in any of these it's a dreadful outcome and some may suggest, as you have, this is the 'beginning of the end' for shooting at major sporting occasions like the Commonwealth Games and, heaven forbid, the Olympics.

Unbelievably, Australia sent not a solitary junior athlete to the recent World Championships in Croatia for the Skeet competition, no men either and just one female competitor so not having Skeet at the Commonwealth Games may seem logical. This is an argument I certainly don't agree with but the reality is that rebuilding the ranks would appear to be simply too hard.

The real problem is that many people who may have been considering taking up Skeet, full bore or buying a rimfire pistol with serious intention of making a national squad down the track are probably now being advised by their friends to reconsider and find another recreation to pursue in their spare time. I feel for the juniors and parents in those disciplines which have been excluded as their dreams have been crushed and, depressingly, this is yet another reason not to take up our sport which in the long-term will be detrimental to us all.

In saying all that I'm still of the opinion that any shooting is better than no shooting, though I fully understand the criticism and anger from some sections of our community for adopting this stance. The common complaint is we should stand united or fall as one which is fine in theory but asking Trap or air pistol competitors to boycott the Games is as likely to happen as being hit by Halley's Comet on the way home from work tomorrow. Our medal tally in Victoria will certainly be dented as at Commonwealth level Australia has a long history of athletes gracing the winner's podium in all those events that've been overlooked.

Another bewildering factor is the 2026 Commonwealth showpiece has been touted as the 'rural Games' and if ever a full shooting program would've found support from the Australian public it's when these events were being staged by a rural community. Shotgun has its Victorian state shooting centre in the border town of Echuca so country areas still may see some action, but as to where air pistol and rifle will be held is not yet clear. I hope the State Government is true to its word and hold these events

in rural Victoria with hopefully a range somewhere being upgraded so the shooting sports can inherit some legacy. It would be a travesty if these events are simply handed to existing Melbourne venues.

I'm sorry I can't unravel the political machinations behind why the shooting sports were excluded from Birmingham this year and only half of them reinstated in Victoria, though I can confidently say that if India had applied for the 2030 Commonwealth Games then a full shooting program would've been offered as I expect the 2032 Brisbane Olympics will (with the exception of full bore). After that I'm not so confident.

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Q I was reading Barry Wilmot's Reloading column in your September 2022 edition and would like to take the issue of case separation a bit further. It sounds as if this is a not uncommon occurrence for Barry but as incipient case-head separation is a serious and potentially dangerous situation, it would seem a far better idea is to prevent it from happening in the first place. Bending a small hook on the end of a piece of thin wire (a paper clip will do) and inserting this into the case will allow you to feel any areas where thinning or stretching of the case occurs. Many reloading books have instructions on how to go about this as well as explaining the causes of case separation. I was also interested in the comments about opening the case mouth to allow a new projectile easy access. I know that when reloading for pistol or rifle cartridges using lead projectiles it's necessary to put a slight bell or flare on the case mouth by setting the expander plug to the required depth but I'm unaware of this being used for jacketed projectiles.

Rodney Goldie, via email

A You're quite right Rodney, having a separated case in the chamber is not good and of course it would be preferable to fix the problem before it happens. Using a round file to extract the separated case is a simple operation but if you don't have one to hand then extraction can be difficult and could potentially ruin a good hunting trip through the rifle being rendered unusable.

Your tip of using a paper clip to detect areas of thinning of the case wall is also a good one. Opening the case mouth of the cartridge to allow easy access of the projectile is more relevant when using cast lead projectiles which I probably should have stipulated so well spotted Rodney.

Barry Wilmot



Q I'm wondering if someone can help identify an SMLE rifle I've had for some time. There are a number of other marks on various parts which may help ascertain the provenance of this firearm (see photos). Any help identifying the rifle would be greatly appreciated. I've also included some shots of an accompanying bayonet, hoping you may shed some light on that too.

Ray Mendoza, Vic

A Thanks for your queries Ray. To answer your second one first, your bayonet marked on the 'left ricasso' (upper flat of the blade just below the grips) with Crown over GR followed by 1907, S294, above WS, above 5 43 indicate it's a 'Pattern 1907' model made by the Wilkinson Sword company of England in May 1943.

The rifle is of course a Number 1 Mk 3* SMLE and the markings on the left upper surface of both receiver and barrel indicate it was made at the Ishapore factory in India. The Crown over GRI barely visible in your photo of the butt socket refers to Georgius Rex Imperator (King George, Emperor of India) which places the date as before 1948. The Indian factory produced more than 600,000 rifles (compared to Lithgow's 500,000) and many remain in service even today in India.

Your rifle No 4574J was most likely made before rifle number 56112F which was made in 1947. I strongly suspect yours was made around 1944-45 and would have looked something like the one in the photo.

Geoff Smith



Q Please thank Paul Miller for his review of the Miroku ML11 Adjustable Sporter in an earlier edition as it turned out to be a valuable piece of information - I used this shotgun to win the 2022 SCA Queensland State Championships in Grade C. To better my skill-set I've started coaching lessons with Daryl Groundwater, overall High Gun winner in that same competition and he suggested I change to a more agile shotgun as the ML11 ACS is heavy (mostly in the front). Would Paul have any views on this?

Yuvraj Salvi, Qld

A Hi Yuvraj and congratulations on your win - that's a wonderful start to your competitive Sporting Clays career, a great feeling and one you'll want to repeat in the near future I'm sure. I know Daryl Groundwater personally and consider him to be among the most knowledgeable and skilful shotgunners in Australia so with Daryl on the job and your passion and determination it won't be long until the B-graders then A-graders at your club will be nervous!

Nowadays all the shotgunning disciplines are best done with guns of significant weight and near neutral balance. The weight dampens down the shooter's movements and reduces felt recoil which can be significant during a 100-target competition. In the early days, guns with shorter 28" barrels and much faster handling were standard but as clay shooting has become more sophisticated we've seen a gradual move to longer barrels in all disciplines, especially Trap and Sporting Clays.

In Sporting the targets are often long crossers and going-away birds so steadier guns with longer barrels which shoot their patterns very flat are best suited to these targets and many Skeet competitors now use light 30" and sometimes 32" barrels on this close-range game of precision shooting. You can't afford to drop a target in Skeet or Trap and this is becoming increasingly true of Sporting Clays where the top shots post incredible scores.



The Miroku ML11 is a heavy but effective shotgun.

If you want to make your gun feel lighter in the barrels and faster handling you can always add a little weight in the butt. Balance is a personal thing but I expect you and Daryl will have that sorted out quickly. Spend some time at the pattern board so you know exactly where your gun shoots, take your coach's advice and you'll be picking up a lot more prizes I suspect. Good luck.

Paul Miller

Q I thought this photo would be of interest to readers of our magazine. I found some .22 cases while prospecting in WA. I'm 65 and have never seen this type of firing pin imprint before and would be interested to know what firearm has been used.

Mal Meares, WA

A Your photo depicts a very unusual firing pin strike which made a deep impression across the base of a .22 Long Rifle cartridge and one firearm that could be responsible is the French-made Gevarm A6 self-loading rifle. The A6 is one of the 'A' series of .22 rimfire rifles which were made until the mid-1990s when the company closed following changes to firearm laws in France.

The A6 uses a very simple and unique operating system. It's an open-bolt rifle which means the bolt stays locked open and cocked until the trigger is pulled at which

point it slides forward under the pressure of a strong spring, stripping a round from the magazine and ramming it into the chamber. As the attached photo shows, the firing pin or striker is fixed as part of the bolt face so there are no moving parts on the bolt.

Once the round is chambered the remaining force of the bolt hammers the rim of the case, leaving a deep crease across the rim and setting off the priming compound inside. There's no extractor on the bolt either and recoil of the fired cartridge blows the bolt back, ejecting the case and returning the bolt to the locked open position until the trigger is pulled again.

This system also incorporates a very effective safety feature as removing the magazine means there's no cartridge to pick up when the trigger is pulled. If there's a misfire (and because there's no extractor) an unfired round would have to be removed manually so Gevarm designers attempted to eliminate misfires by having both sides of the rim struck at the same time, giving the priming compound a better chance of ignition. Other than the A6 some readers may know of other brands and/or firearms using this operating system.

Rod Pascoe





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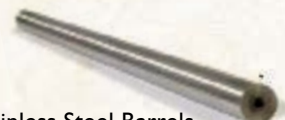
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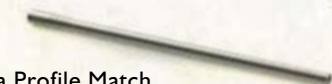


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Copy that!

Turkish replica up there with Italian original, writes John McDougall

In my role as an outdoors writer of more than 40 years there have been some truly joyous moments when a gun of quality and handling comes across my bench for review. In recent years we've seen an influx of shotguns from Turkey which I've described as 'Turkish delights' but the latest one forwarded to the *Australian Shooter* for assessment, the Victory RT25 Sporting, more than fits that description.

For almost a decade various companies there have been replicating to the finest detail the firearms from a famous Italian gunmaker. The Turkish Government has provided support with substantial sums being invested in the best CNC machinery and with access to such state-of-the-art equipment, manufacturers in that country have produced remarkable duplicate guns and adorned them with quality walnut to further enhance their appeal.

The Victory RT25 Sporting is so well copied that its components are interchangeable with its Italian Master model, the only discernible difference being the price tag. An Italian version of the RT25 might set you back more than \$10,000 whereas the gun under review is around \$7750 for the equivalent base model and \$10,750 for the impressive deluxe engraved which comes in a solid leather case with canvas cover. That represents excellent value for money and from those I shared the RT25 with to shoot, several who use the original Italian Master noticed no real difference except for the Turkish brand being a little heavier. So let's have a closer look at this appealing firearm.

Barrels

These are immaculately finished on the silver receiver model and with silver soldered together and expertly blued, there's no sign of solder residue as may

have been found on Turkish guns of 10-15 years ago. These are every bit as well-made as the Italian Master.

In the black version of the Victory RT25, all is black chromed for a harder and more resilient surface and with a selection of top ribs available upon ordering, the review gun comes with a 10mm parallel option standing around 7mm high and ventilated. Topped with a fluoro sight at the muzzle and white bead midway down the rib, it's nicely completed for the competition shooter. The side ribs joining the barrels are not ventilated.

At the muzzle end the barrels are fitted with 51mm internal choke tubes, the supplied spanner of solid construction and a pleasure to use for changing chokes (don't forget to apply a thin coating of tube grease before installing to facilitate the gas seal and make removal easier). At 760mm/30" the barrels are well suited to simulated field

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Turkish replica up there with Italian original



Victory RT25 Sporting's stylish lines showing an uncanny likeness to its Italian Master.

shooting or sporting clays and for shooters after 32" barrels or left-handed guns, both are available. The mid-rib bead is well appreciated to determine whether you're canting the gun to one side or another and facilitate setting up the adjustable comb.

At the chamber end the gun is matched to 70mm/2¾" cartridges only (many guns nowadays are made to accommodate 76mm/3" shells) and you'd be right in thinking the Victory RT25 Sporting is designed as a dedicated clay target competition gun and not for hunting. The ejectors are quite solid and well timed but in use I had to break the gun fully open to cock the firing mechanism and eject empty shells.

Receiver

Design here is relatively simple compared to the engraving on the deluxe version though the base model looks good and is every bit a copy of its Italian Master right down to the Boss locking system and drop-out triggers. I was impressed. The RT25 is so well reproduced the triggerlock components are interchangeable with the Italian model, removal done in a similar fashion. The safety catch is moved forward until a red dot shows beneath the trigger mechanism then the top lever is locked into position before the trigger set



Close-up of the Victory RT25 Sporting action.

can be removed, all detailed in the instruction booklet provided. The top lever is well designed although the edges should've been smoothed over a little more and curved for ease of operation, though otherwise it works seamlessly.

The barrel selector-cum-safety catch works well but be aware the selector must

be pushed fully to the side you want to fire firstly as confusion won't allow the gun to fire, much the same as most other guns with a similar barrel selector mechanism. Design of the triggerguard and triggerfoot is superb, the former large enough to accommodate thin leather gloves while its shape and size don't detract from the overall lines of the gun, the triggerfoot adjustable via the screwdriver provided. Triggerpulls are quite fine at 1kg (2¼lb) for the under barrel and 1.15kg (2½lb) for the over and well suited to a competition shotgun.

Stock and fore-end

Visually this is where the gun outstrips the Italian Master. The walnut on the basic model is stunning, equivalent to Grade 3 or above with character and grain only found on shotguns costing thousands of dollars more. The stock's colour and character are matched to the fore-end with chequering around 20 lines/inch, the oiled finish applied to both stock and fore-end just sensational.

The adjustable comb meant I was able to tweak the stock to fit me perfectly. This has index markings so the comb can be returned to a previous setting and an ample

Two cases for the choke tubes and spare trigger set conveniently fit into a forward compartment.





set of washers are provided to modify for height with only one Allen key required for all alterations. Chequering is faultless though I'd prefer a little more on the fore-end for firmer grip and improved gun control, maybe something to consider.

Over the traps

This is where the Victory RT25 excels. I shot quite a few rounds of DTL at Beaufort Gun Club in Victoria followed by several sessions at Frankston Field & Game shooting practice simulated field targets. It had been more than 30 years since I shot DTL competitively but the Victory obliterated target after target with two characteristics I particularly enjoyed being its patterns and lack of recoil (a set of pattern sheets are provided with the gun). Being far from the 90mm chokes used by present-day gunmakers, the shorter 51mm internal choke tubes coupled with the lengthened forcing cones certainly destroy targets and



Barrel selector-cum-safety catch in traditional position on the top tang.

while at 3.25kg this gun is no lightweight, there's something in the design which helps soften recoil.

Given the Victory RT25 costs about 70 per cent of its Italian counterpart and is every bit a top performer, I'd have no hesitation in highly recommending it either in silver receiver, black chrome or deluxe engraved. The base model comes with a well-finished canvas-covered case and two sets of triggers, the deluxe boasts extensive engraving with full leather case and both carry a five-year warranty. ●



Chequering on the pistol grip is perfectly executed.

Specifications:

Manufacturer: Kizilkaya Arms, Turkey
Model: Victory RT25 Sporting over-and-under shotgun (base model)
Australian distributor: Hunt's Shooting Supplies, NSW huntsshooting.com.au
Overall length: 1205mm/47½"
Barrel length: 760mm/30"
Overall weight: 3.25kg/7lb 2oz
Barrel weight: 1.60kg/3lb 6oz
Bore size: Under 0.735", Over 0.732"
Chamber: 70mm/2¾"
Forcing cones: 42mm
Chokes: (51mm tubes, fully internal). Cylinder 0.725", Improved Cylinder 0.716", Modified 0.709", Improved Modified 0.700" and Full 0.695"
Trigger pulls: Under barrel 1kg/2¼lb, Over 1.15kg/2½lb
Stock dimensions: High grade Turkish walnut with adjustable comb. Length of pull: 472mm/14⅝", drop at comb and drop at heel adjustable (Allen key supplied)
Warranty: Five years
Accessories: Canvas-covered case with straps and lock, instruction manual, choke tubes x 5 and second set of triggers.
Price: \$7750 (base model), \$10,750 (deluxe)

A rifle with a scope mounted spotlight ready to engage any deer that enter the specified control area.

Turn up the heat

Matthew Godson concludes his introduction to starting out in thermal

Last month I discussed the concept of improving your pest control efficiency through the use of thermal optics and among other things made some suggestions on how to start a game-changing journey with a thermal monocular and then use other options to help further boost your effectiveness. I introduced some key characteristics and considerations of thermal optics to ensure you start your journey on the right path so let's put that theory to the test.

I participated in a SSAA Conservation and Wildlife Management (CWM) branch pest control exercise in the south-east of South Australia in early June and leading up to this the team at Conotech Australia provided two monocular units with different base magnifications to test. The units were their Tracer LRF 35Pro and Tracer LRF 25Pro models which had only been released recently in Australia. Given last month's article made suggestions to help people find an affordable path into thermal

optics, I'll take a little time to explain why I think these two could be worthy of your consideration.

Both have a quality 384x288 thermal sensor which produces an exceptional frame rate of 50Hz and a NET-D less than 35mK (similar to higher-priced brands) and come with an integrated laser rangefinder with measuring range from five to 1000m. Both have Wi-Fi connectivity and on-board photo/video recording with 32Gb storage capacity, start-up time of less than five seconds and a one-button press standby mode which is handy for preserving battery life.

The units differ in base magnification with the 35Pro having a 35mm objective lens producing 3.3x and the 25Pro a 25mm objective lens for 2.4x while the 1024x768 high-resolution OLED display provides a crisp, richly contrasted and vividly coloured image. Both have digital zoom of 1x/2x/4x, six options of palette, image enhancement and contrast and brightness functions to let you customise the settings to your preference. The built-in lithium battery has a life of eight-plus hours with the option to use a 5V micro USB external power supply if necessary.

On firing up the units I found them fast and simple to operate with the pronounced



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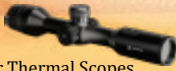
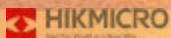


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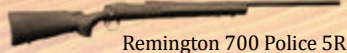
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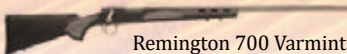
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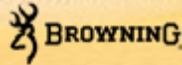
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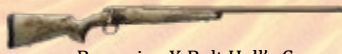
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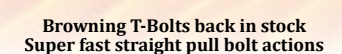
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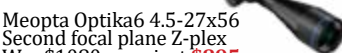
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Turn up the heat



CWM members investigating possible areas to set up to target the deer that left these prints overnight.



CWM President Chris Carroll examines tracks left by deer.

buttons making them easy to use with gloves. The laser rangefinder was able to provide fast and accurate measurement in the hand but for extended distances it pays to have them supported or mounted and this is not a negative, more so a limitation of most laser rangefinding devices if the intended target is relatively small. I'd recommend with any device to range a tree or landscape feature nearby to a small target when trying to determine distance.

The CWM pest control exercise focused on targeting pest animals at pre-determined positions around the boundary of a conservation park as they moved from bushland to neighbouring pastures and based on evidence of animal activity found near fence lines, the CWM team would determine each team member's shooting position (sit and wait) overlooking these areas for the following nights.

On arrival at my allocated position I set up one thermal monocular as a fixed spotter to look down my pre-determined shooting zone and, attaching it to a flexible tripod I had to hold my smartphone during Zoom meetings, was able to secure it to the vehicle's wound-down window frame and connect the unit via Wi-Fi to a tablet for easier monitoring. I used the other monocular randomly to scan the wider area and test the functionality of both optics and opted for the 25Pro as the fixed spotter which, with its wider field of view (FOV), provided coverage across the width of my shooting zone.

At 2.4x base magnification I reckon this unit could be within the sweet spot of FOV so could be handy in multi-use situations. I found that within the first 300m of the open shooting zone the unit detected all that passed before it including a rat and a warm pile of scat left behind by a scurrying wombat. Without tinkering with the contrast and brightness settings to find the best quality image for the conditions, I was still impressed by what was produced by the default settings in the 'black hot' palette and could detect and identify all animals of interest well beyond my comfortable shooting range.

Due to the nature of thermal detection, many signatures can be picked up across the landscape but identification within your effective shooting range is the key consideration. Palette choice is certainly a personal preference with 'white hot' seemingly giving more definition of picture and seeing as I was only there to detect, observe and

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Turn up the heat

identify using the monoculars, I was more than satisfied with my choice of palette (maybe with a thermal scope the palette producing most detail would be best for bullet placement purposes).

As part of my sit and wait set-up for this operation I also had a Racken Rest II from Eagleye Hunting Gear as I'd seen a few of these kind of rifle rests used by other members on previous outings. The rest fitted snug into the window sill (a long or short version is available to fit most vehicles) and provided a flexible but steady shooting platform, so I positioned my rifle to safely rest hands-free pointing down-range ready for action at a moment's notice if a targeted pest was thermally detected.

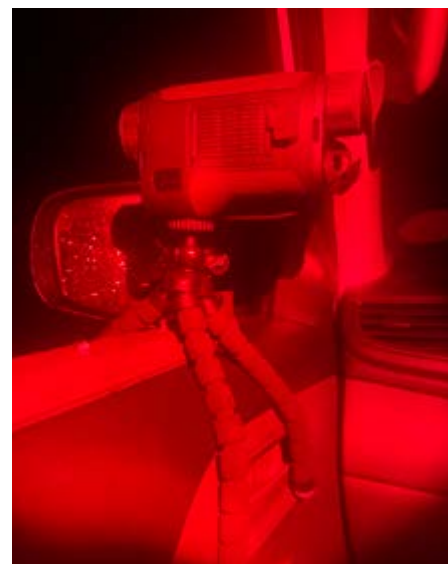
The Racken Rest II made for a stable shooting base which I deem a necessity to make every shot count. The Tikka T3x Hunter with Olight Javelot hunting torch attached to the scope sat well balanced in the rest even when hands-free and was able to be left there ready for action with minimal adjustment required. For

heavier-barrelled rifles there's an option to buy an additional balance strut if the firearm tends to pivot forward when not in the hand.

The Racken Rest II was simple to manoeuvre left or right, up and down or a combination of these into a comfortable shooting position based on where a target presented and would be a great option for those shooting alone in a typical mobile spotlighting situation that requires driving across paddocks. The firearm is held securely and safely in the 'V' mounts using the silicone straps provided and the rest can be locked into position out of the way using the ball point locators which would let you drive and spotlight or thermal scan a paddock on the move.

The rest also added to the stealth aspect of my operation with no banging or clunking of stocks on door frames or dashboards while moving the rifle into firing position and there's no point 'going dark' if all you do is scare off potential targets with constant metallic rattling. A more comprehensive review of the Racken Rest II can be found in Edition 80 of *Australian Hunter* magazine and its RRP is around \$349.

Although I was set up with all the proper gear for success I couldn't control the weather or schedule the appearance of the primary target species during my visit but hey, that's shooting! There were plenty of rabbits, kangaroos and wombats scurrying around to accurately gauge a feeling for the worthiness of the two Conotech monoculars in the field and, as suggested in last month's article, thermal will undoubtedly



The thermal monocular is mounted to the window seal to see what's out there in the dark.

increase detection and subsequently improve your efficiency and culling rates. If I'd been targeting the rabbits I picked up through the monoculars I'd have enjoyed a very successful night's shooting indeed.

If setting out on a limited budget the purchase of a monocular like the Conotech units described will offer good functionality at a reasonable price and would certainly be a favourable starting point for your journey into total dark pest control. RRP for the Tracer LRF 35Pro is around \$2599 and Tracer LRF 25Pro \$2299. ●



Thermal monocular vision of a rabbit sitting by the fence 190m metres away.



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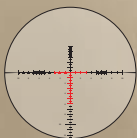
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Sweet and Sauer

Stainless XT rifle a tasty treat,
writes Con Kapralos

JP Sauer & Sohn based in Isny, Germany have produced some excellent sporting rifles in the past decade and, being part of the Blaser/Mauser/Sauer consortium, their rifles continue to cater to all facets of the market from the classic Sauer S404 switch-barrel platform to the entry-level S100. Yet the term 'entry-level' doesn't do justice to the Sauer S100, which has been available in numerous applications from hunting models to more specialised rifles in the Pantera and Fieldshoot.

The S100 bracket has embraced all manner of metal and stock manufacture materials with satin black, stainless and Cerakoted finishes adorning firearms with the ErgoMax designed riflestocks which consists of glass-filled polymer stocks in various colours and finishes to a timber option in the beechwood (no walnut available in the S100).

One thing missing was a standard polymer stock (no soft-touch) with a stainless steel barrelled action and while the S100 XTA with adjustable cheekpiece, soft-touch polymer stock and stainless metalwork came close, many Australian hunters on hard terrain want a rifle that's tough and impervious to the elements. The standard polymer stock and stainless steel is just the ticket and Sauer distributor Outdoor Sporting Agencies sent *Australian Shooter* the S100 Stainless XT for review in the venerable .308 Winchester calibre topped with a fine Zeiss Conquest V6 riflescope.

At a glance

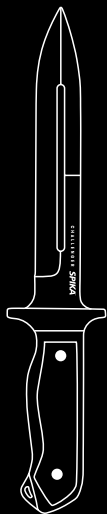
The bare firearm weighs 3.07kg and is 1060mm long, right on the money for a serious hunting rifle where overall weight is important once a scope has been mounted.

Receiver

This is made from a single piece of stainless barstock with the front receiver ring maintaining a circular profile. The top then takes on a scalloped flat profile which forms part of the ejection port bridge and continues as a flat segment to the rear receiver ring and bolt handle notch. Scope-mounting is easy as the front and rear receiver rings are drilled and tapped to accept Remington 700-style bases and are a perfect fit for the supplied Nikko Stirling Zero Lok scope-mounting hardware.

The left of the receiver has another scalloped flat in circular profile with 'Sauer 100' neatly engraved into the steel, other markings on the left of the front receiver ring bearing the rifle's serial number, country and year of manufacture while on the rear left receiver ring is the bolt-release button. This is designed with ease-of-use as a priority and also serves as the bolt guide with an internal lug mating with a milled slot on the bolt body to ensure silky-smooth bolt travel.

Internally a breech ring (locking bush) is where the bolt lugs achieve lock-up once the bolt is closed, a deviation from having lug recesses milled into the receiver ring,



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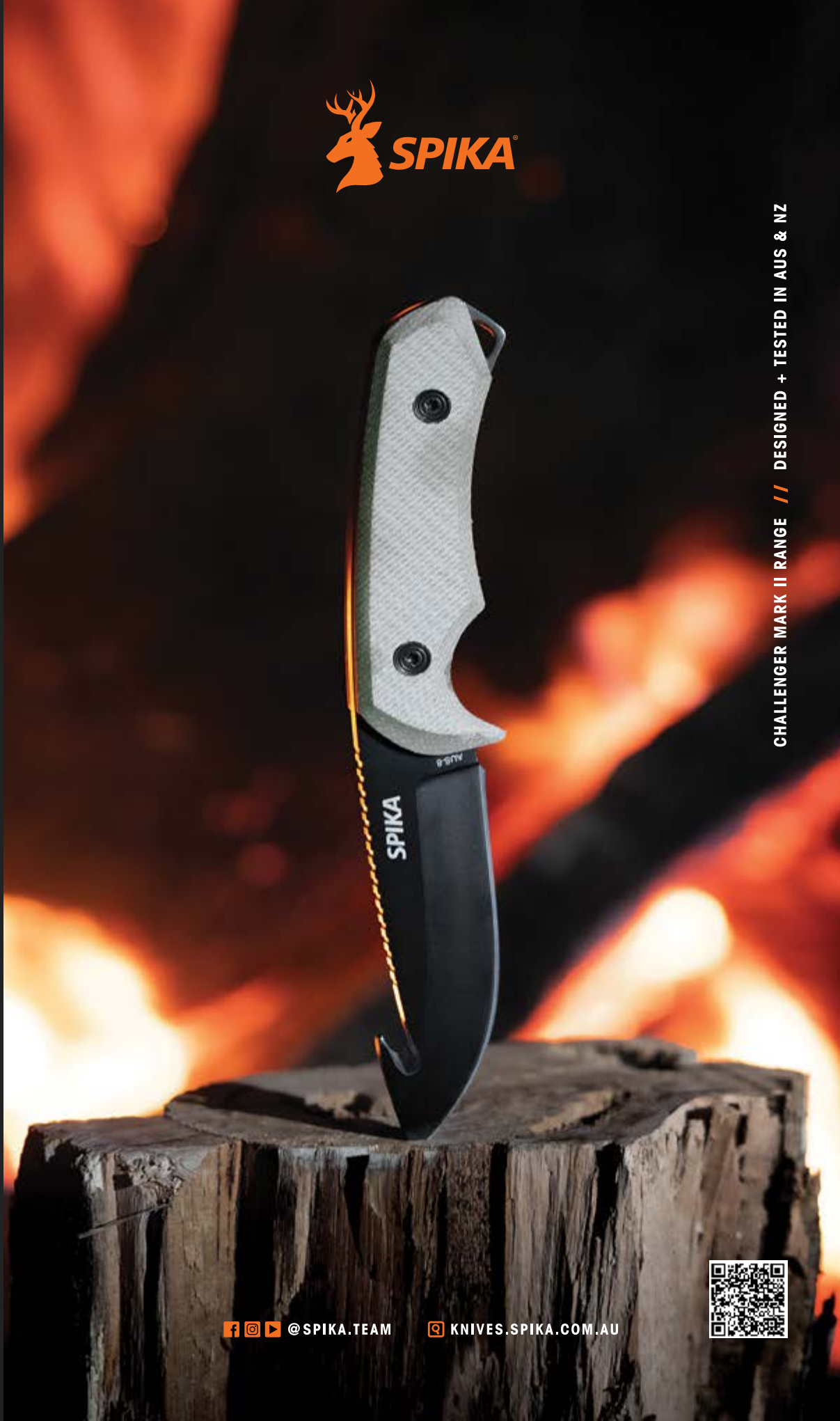
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SMALL FOLDER

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W: 23mm
HRC: 58-60
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Sweet and Sauer

the breech ring system ensuring more precise fitting of the barrel when screwed into the receiver and guaranteeing correct headspace is set. The rear tang of the receiver, where the bolt raceway opening is, has a curved profile which slopes down to the head of the stock and blends in seamlessly with the bolt shroud for a clean look, only interrupted by the black cocking indicator which gives both a visual and tactile appearance when the bolt is cocked.

Barrel

This is also stainless steel and of a sporter profile measuring 22" (560mm). It's made by the cold-hammer forging process which gives an excellent finish both inside and out as well as delivering in the accuracy stakes with all Sauer S100 rifles carrying a five-shot sub-MOA guarantee.

Externally the knox form shows the usual proof markings as well as calibre, maker's name and country of origin and the barrel tapers down to the muzzle where it's threaded to accept any accessories, a stainless steel cap fitted to protect the threads when not in use. The crown has a neat and slightly concave finish that should enhance accuracy of the one-in-11" twist barrel in .308 Winchester, which should be suited to most common .30-calibre projectiles in the 130 to 180-grain weight range.

Bolt, trigger, safety

The first of these is a 'fat-bolt' design with the body running the full diameter, terminating with the bolt-head and three locking lugs cut into the leading edge. A slot machined into the length of the bolt body mates with a lug integral to the release button which acts as a guide for the bolt to travel on, giving smooth action along its cycle. The locking lugs offer a 60-degree bolt lift and case ejection is via two plungers through the recessed bolt-face together with a claw extractor fitted to one of the lugs, this system ensuring that cases whether fired or not are positively ejected without issue. The bolt handle and knob are neatly designed with a steel handle shank attached to the bolt body which kicks out perpendicular before sweeping back slightly, the polymer bolt knob providing the means for holding on to. It's comfortable to grip and serves its purpose well.

The trigger is the standard unit found on all Sauer S100 models and is excellent, being of a single-stage design, fully adjustable between 1-2kg with the review rifle having release at 1.4kg. The trigger gave virtually no creep, broke cleanly and can be adjusted to suit the user, though as supplied was spot-on for a hunting rifle. The trigger



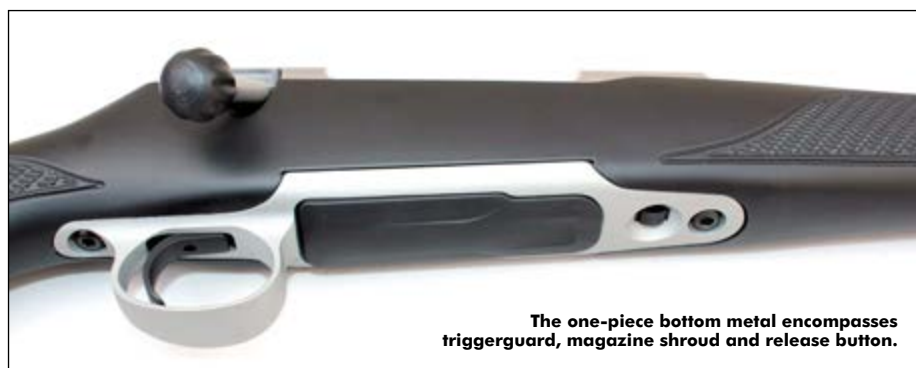
The receiver is stainless cylindrical barstock finished to high tolerances. Note the three-position safety.



Well-profiled bolt release on the left of the rear receiver ring also acts as a guide for the bolt to travel on.



The sporter-weight barrel is threaded to take compatible accessories.



The one-piece bottom metal encompasses triggerguard, magazine shroud and release button.

shoe is aluminium with a smooth finish, protected by a one-piece triggerguard/magazine shroud which blends in superbly with the lines of the stock.

Likewise the safety is an absolute joy to use being of three-position linear travel, tucked in behind the bolt-notch with markings of 'S', 'SO' and 'F'. The most rearward setting (S) locks the trigger and bolt, sliding the lever to the middle (SO) allows the bolt to be cycled with the trigger blocked and moving it fully forward (F) enables the rifle to be fired.

Magazine

This is a detachable box design and made of tough polymer, a twin-stack arrangement holding five rounds in standard calibres. It's easy to load when removed from the rifle and clips into place well, sitting flush with the bottom of the stock. The magazine is detached by pressing a small button in the recess just forward of the magazine well and additionally can be smoothly top-loaded through the ejection port.



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Sweet and Sauer

Stock

The ErgoMax stock would have to rate as one of the most comfortable on the market with excellent ergonomics and clean lines suited to both right and left-handed shooters. The classic American pattern with its simple layout and absence of cheekpieces or combs is further enhanced by an open pistol grip with ambidextrous palmswells and well laid-out panels of chequering either side of the grip and fore-end, complemented by the Schnabel fore-end tip.

The polymer unit is dark grey which accentuates the stainless steel barrelled action and aluminium triggerguard/magazine shroud. Other S100 models have a similar polymer stock with 'soft-touch' finish which is essentially a rubber coating applied to the polymer to enhance grip and while soft-touch stocks give a nice tactile feel they can be easily marked if pursuing quarry through scrub and brush.

I've seen other manufacturers who use these rubber coatings on polymer stocks encounter issues with the surface becoming 'sticky' to the touch and while I haven't heard of Sauer S100 stocks having this problem, owners should be aware it could happen to any 'soft-touch' stock. The polymer stock has a normal synthetic feel and it's an excellent material for a rifle that'll be put to use in Australia's climatic extremes, easily washed with warm soapy water and the chequering can similarly be cleaned with a soft-bristled toothbrush.

The stock's fitted with QD sling-swivel studs and a firm rubber Sauer recoil pad. Internally, Sauer's Ever-Rest bedding system is again used and consists of an aluminium bedding block epoxied into the floor of the stock, the block having an integral recoil lug which mates with a slot machined into the underside of the front receiver ring as well as providing access for the tension bolt that's captive to that front receiver ring.

This front tension bolt anchors the front receiver ring to the stock using a separate 10mm nut with another 4mm hex-head bolt anchoring the front portion of the stock to the bottom metal by screwing into the opposite end of the 10mm stock nut. The rear stock/action fastener is a 4mm hex-head bolt which similarly screws into the rear trigger unit fastener.

At the range

The rifle was put through its paces in the usual 100m accuracy test using factory hunting ammunition covering the 130 to 180-grain projectile weight bracket. The superb Zeiss Conquest V6 2.5-15x56 made

Sauer S100 Stainless XT: .308 Winchester – Accuracy test at 100m - groups in mm

Ammunition	Best	Worst	Average*
Federal Power-Shok 130gr Speer HP	22	38	29
Sako Gamehead 150gr SP	18	29	24
Hornady InterLock 150gr SP	25	46	36
GECO Express 165gr	15	30	21
Winchester Super X 180gr SP	28	52	41

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

Left side of the polymer buttstock is devoid of cheekpieces or raised combs.



shooting accurate groups much easier, target frames crystal clear with the scope set at 15x.

All ammunition shot well with three brands averaging around 1 MOA (Federal, Sako, GECO) and the other two around 1.5-1.7 MOA (Hornady, Winchester). Pleasingly, all five brands would make an excellent load for shooting out to 300m as anything further is pushing the boundaries of ethical hunting and shot placement.

In the field

A winter deer hunt was a suitable opportunity to take the rifle afield and it was dialled in with the GECO Express load and sighted-in 60mm high at 100m. The rifle and Zeiss V6 scope, at around 3.8kg, carried well while stalking but if this was my rifle I'd fit a lighter 3-9x40 scope to cut the overall weight to around 3.5-3.6kg, my ideal weight for stalking. The rifle performed as expected when duty called, harvesting a couple of fallow deer spikers in prime

condition for the freezer with consecutive shots at just over 200m - hunting with the S100 Stainless XT is indeed a pleasure.

Summary.

The Sauer S100 continues to be well received in Australia and is an excellent option for the first-time buyer or seasoned hunter after an additional calibre. The S100 Stainless XT is available in seven calibres from .223 Rem right up to .300 Win Mag with an RRP of around \$1395. More at www.osaaustralia.com.au ●

Specifications:

Rifle: Sauer S100 Stainless XT

Action: Bolt-action with 60-degree bolt lift

Trigger: Single-stage, adjustable for weight

Trigger pull: 1-2kg (1.4kg as tested)

Calibres: .223 Rem, .243 Win, .270 Win, 6.5CM, .308 Win (tested), .30-06 Sprg, .300 Win Mag

Capacity: Five-round detachable polymer box magazine (four in Magnum calibres)

Barrel: 560mm (std), 620mm (Magnum)

Muzzle: Threaded M15x1 or M14x1

Sights: Drilled and tapped to accept Remington 700 bases/rails

Stock: Sauer ErgoMax synthetic polymer, Ever-Rest bedding system (beechwood stock option on S100 Classic Stainless)

Weight: 3.07kg (as tested)

Length: 1060mm (as tested)

RRP: \$1395 (S100 Classic Stainless \$1495)

Distributor: Outdoor Sporting Agencies



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Lessening of two evils

Chris Redlich removes a pair
of canine cattle-killers

A restless night's sleep following a successful wild dog hunt less than 24 hours earlier kept me awake as my mind insisted on replaying events as they'd unfolded. The previous morning's outing was still fresh as I recalled vividly the excitement and anticipation as we pulled up at the property before first light. There's something pure about the bush before sunrise, the smell of apparent moisture in the soil and absolute silence before a kookaburra's first call of the day.

You could be forgiven for momentarily thinking the drought was over until the first signs of daylight soon revealed the sinister side of an extended dry spell, evident by the brown tinge of a parched and undulating countryside. With just enough sub-soil moisture to keep recent crops growing for cattle feed, a farmer's healthy beasts can

well do without competing with wild dogs for life itself.

I was joining my good mate Josh for a hunt close to home on a property where he'd been controlling wild dogs for years. It's impossible for landowners to be completely over the feral pest menace, a responsibility Josh as a recreational hunter is more than happy to shoulder. We parked the ute and headed quietly along the fence line close to bordering trees to reduce our risk of being sky-lined. It was dark enough to move relatively undetected but light enough to see as the sun was rising ahead of us.

A hare burst from cover up ahead and had the old 'ticker' racing though not enough to shoulder my rifle - we were here to hunt wild dogs and any opportunistic blast from a .284 Win would be a real hunt-stopper. After what seemed an eternity, although

realistically only a few hundred metres from the vehicle, moving to our observation post was done with every inch of caution and ever so slowly. Josh signalled we were close to a dam known locally as the 'honey hole', aptly named as it had delivered untold numbers of wild dogs using the water point as a place of rest and rehydration, nestled within a lightly timbered gully which offers them a clear vantage point for their prey grazing the paddocks below.

Now in the hot zone we moved gradually to a tree line providing cover and a fire-lane to the dam and as we rested the rifles on a tree branch, it didn't take long before a hint of movement grabbed our attention. I'll admit that prior to the hunt I'd kept my reservations of seeing anything to myself as I've had people talk-up potential game sightings on numerous occasions but Josh's



Cattle the wild dogs prey on also featured on trail cam footage.

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Difficult sight picture through thick scrub at the dam where dogs were watering 200m away.

Lessening of two evils

experience and knowledge was right on the money this time.

My heart rate spiked a touch as three ginger-coloured wild dogs ran away from the dam almost basking in their freedom back and forth from the water's edge. For me, tracking wild dogs is right up there with deer hunting and always has been but the reality is a hunt isn't successful until the dogs are down, so it was important I didn't let excitement overrule my nerves.

Ranging them at 200m we settled for a shot but these cattle-killers weren't going to let us take them easily. I managed a brief sight picture only to have it obstructed by foliage which blocked a clear shot at one of the dogs and as taking a hasty shot wasn't an option I thought twice. A darting wild dog at 200m is a much harder shot than a full-size deer at that range so I opted to continue the hunt by stealth. Josh agreed and we regrouped to go again.

The dogs by this point had all but disappeared and noting their direction of travel we repositioned ourselves to hopefully cut them off over the hill with an ambush-style approach. Clear of the timber and with the sun now offering its fair share of daylight

we stayed within shade of the trees and looking towards the east where the dogs were heading, Josh gave a few 'whimpering' sounds to hopefully catch their attention. Then standing behind Josh and peering intently through the trees my hackles were raised by movement in my peripheral vision - I'd spotted them and alerted Josh to their location.

I pointed him in their direction as they closed in through the scrub from the south. We were caught in the open and froze so I instinctively brought the rifle to my shoulder and took aim as they broke cover from the trees and at an unnervingly close range of 35-40m the first dog filled my scope. By now they were on to us and as the pack's lead bitch ran across my front a thud indicated a solid hit as she dropped instantly.

The big male turned and headed for the scrub from where they'd come but couldn't outrun a second bullet from my custom .284 Win, though the third evaded us and lived to see another sunrise - for now. All up it took me a lot more time to write those last few words than it did to despatch two wild dogs which fell in three or four seconds.

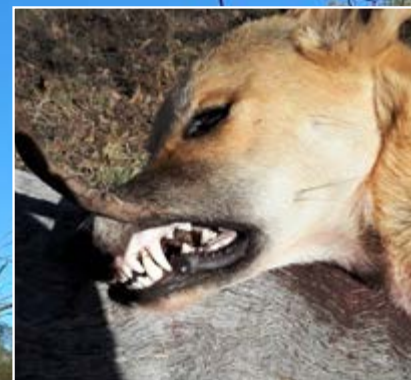
A 150-grain Ballistic Tip from a .284 Win might seem heavy on wild dogs but I never heard either complain of how quickly they'd met their demise as both had fallen instantly and humanely which is always our intention. There before us lay the reward for Josh, myself and our hard efforts and with the property relieved of another two cattle-killers it was time to enjoy our beautiful surrounds after a brief photo session.

Still elated from the hunt and with food the last thing on my mind, my stomach reminded me breakfast was fast approaching but before our departure we checked Josh's trail cams for footage. Along with their prey (cattle) wild dog activity featured heavily on the cameras as evidence revealed they frequent the area we'd just targeted and by the look of it the two we'd just shot had played a starring role in the footage.

Our morning success was a combination of Josh's diligence and hard work but for me was more a stroke of good luck than good management. That hunt remained fresh in my mind for the next few days and if I ever needed a reason to justify a restless night then removing that pair of ruthless predators was it. ●

Wild dog duo removed from the property.

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Optical option

ZeroTech binos worth a second look,
says Mark van den Boogaart

It's writing day and sitting beside my keyboard is a slightly used pair of ZeroTech 10x42mm Thrive HD binoculars and during the past few weeks the Thrives and I have travelled 2500km, walked a few tracks and searched for Brisbane Valley pigs. Thinking about binoculars it's hard to ignore the fact the sports optics market is dominated by the European kings and while it's a great way to start an argument, I reckon the crown is held jointly by Swarovski and Leica with Zeiss and Steiner constantly looking for ways to dethrone them.

And rightfully so as German-made optics rule the roost for one very good reason: they're the best but if you want to hang out with royalty then be prepared to pay a princely sum. Of course there are other options including new players entering the market and some years ago while in the UK, a good friend introduced me to GPO



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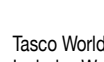
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Optical option



The classic look of the ZeroTech binos.

(German Precision Optics) a brand now regarded as one of the mainstays in sports optics.

Here in Australia we also have those willing to push their way into the market, one being ZeroTech and after seeing their ads in *Australian Shooter* I started to look a little more closely and found out, by accident, the very gentleman who introduced me to GPO in England now distributes ZeroTech throughout the UK. In fact as I write this review he's testing some of their new scopes in the Scottish Highlands.

But back to the task in hand. The Thrive HD are ZeroTech's first Extra-low Dispersion (ED) glass binoculars and this is important as ED glass overcomes the fact that light (and especially colours) travel on different wavelengths and don't like to be bent round corners. Now this isn't a problem when you look at the world through the genius of your eyes but once you start trying to capture all those different wavelengths via a lens, colours appear to separate and create what's called a secondary spectrum. To make matters worse, magnification exacerbates or widens that spectrum.

What that means is generally the observed object has a fringe or coloured

halo around it. Low magnification combined with good manufacturing tolerances can minimise the effect but you can't make it disappear so to overcome the issue, as you can't remove it, you need ED glass as it reduces the differing light wavelengths into a more compact spectrum. It compresses them. To the eye a compact secondary spectrum means no fringing as well as greater clarity and sharper images so in short, ED glass is a very good thing.

Working in tandem with the ED glass, ZeroTech Thrives also make use of fully multi-coated lenses and prisms which enhance your view by improving the binocular's light gathering capabilities. To bring it all together the Thrive HDs have a wide field of view which reduces the 'telescope effect' and makes the image more natural rather than like looking through a tube. Aside from the optical tech the Thrive HDs feature a fast-focus wheel that's both smooth to operate and has a high level of incremental adjustment so you can really dial in on a specific point within a larger landscape.

On the outside these binos are protected by what ZeroTech describe as ergonomic rubber armour though I personally wouldn't call it rubber as it's more like a hard skin



The supplied chest rig.

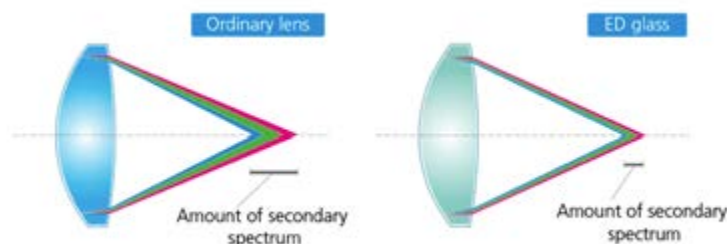
which feels like it would provide a high level of abrasion resistance as well as direct impact protection. Continuing that theme the lenses themselves are protected by integrated flip-down covers for the objective (front) and removable covers for the Ocular (rear).

One thing which did strike me as a standout feature of Thrive binoculars is the amount of accessories which come in the box as along with the standard neck strap and cleaning cloth is a purpose-built chest rig. The rig includes a fully enclosed binocular pouch with magnetic clip, a sizeable zippered front pocket, rear slip-style pocket and two smaller side pockets all held in place by a well-made adjustable harness. Chest rigs for binoculars are a great addition to your hunting kit and having one supplied certainly saves money. Finally there's the ZeroTech warranty, a 'Triple-A' unconditional lifetime affair which means it extends to Any owner (so can sell them on) for Any problem and they're Always covered.

The first part of field testing meant taking the Thrives on a family road trip and let's make this clear, if they can survive my two boys they're doing better than Okay. More importantly the outing gave me the chance to use them for general observation, generate a feel for what they're like to carry and pass them around a few different users.

During that trip the Thrive HDs accompanied us on walking tracks, mooching around country towns and seeing the sights. We tended not to use the purpose-built chest rig, most often carrying them in a small day pack and that being the case, after the second day I removed the strap as it tended to become caught up when taking them out.

Secondary spectrum analysis.



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Optical option

While the road trip wasn't a particularly tough test the binos performed very well and offered clear, crisp viewing across a range of setting and locations, the whole family enjoying the chance to use them including when we spotted goats at distance around Copeton Dam. However the outing highlighted two points worth noting, the first being the integrated flip-down covers get in the way at times, something I've experienced with other brands so personally I'd remove them and rely on the chest rig to provide suitable protection for the objective lenses in a hunting scenario.

The second consideration is their physical size as these 10x42mm binoculars are longer than both my comparable Steiner and Leica 10x42s, though interestingly it didn't make them any less comfortable to carry or use. However if you're considering retro-fitting the Thrive HDs to an existing chest rig or similar-style binocular pouch you may want to check the measurements first.

Now hunting gear reviews really should include some hunting so on returning home I grabbed my rifle and went in search of game. After several dry years the pigs have returned to my favourite block so over the spring and summer they've become my

hunting focus. On this particular trip after checking the trail cameras the boys and I visited different observation points around the block to see what was about.

Throughout a day in the field the Thrive HDs came into their own. Firstly the chest rig made carrying them a breeze and also made observations on the go that much easier as being able to easily access your binos then return them to a secure location does seem to make you use them more, which is a good habit for a hunter.

In more static positions the 10x magnification gives a good mix of power to weight, meaning they were comfortable to use over longer periods. Continuing to adjust point of focus with the quick-focus wheel made checking different parts of the block a breeze, especially when I spotted a pig that turned out to be a rock - damn rock-pigs. All in all the Thrive HD binoculars performed well where it counted most and that's searching for game.

In a world of high-end and high-priced sports optics, Australian-owned ZeroTech Thrive HD binoculars offer a different option. Taking into consideration their quality and specifications, in the box accessories including chest rig and that unconditional lifetime warranty, at around \$749



The Thrive HD binos somewhere on a walking track around Walcha.

they represent serious optical bang for your hunting buck. ZeroTech binoculars are available at all good gun shops and www.zerotech.com.au ●

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SPECIFICATIONS

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- Magazine Cap. .177/38, 22/28, .25/28 .30/23 & .35/18.
- Adjustable dual regulators.
- 16 stage power adjuster.
- Interchangeable calibre .177,.22,.25,.30 & .35.
- Carbon fibre tank 580cc (Sniper) 480cc (Std.)
- Adjustable Match trigger
- Interchangeable ambidextrous bolt.
- AR platform grip.



FX DREAMLINE CLASSIC WALNUT

SPECIFICATIONS

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- Walnut stock.
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CARBON FIBRE TANK
ADJUSTABLE POWER
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AMBI. STOCK

MAX AIR	MAG CAPACITY	AIR CAPACITY	PRESSURE	WEIGHT	LENGTH
CAL. .177	12	290cc	250 BAR	3.5 KG	82 CM
CAL. .22	10	290cc	250 BAR	3.5 KG	82 CM
CAL. .25	9	290cc	250 BAR	3.5 KG	82 CM
CAL. .30	7	290cc	250 BAR	3.5 KG	89 CM



AIR SPEED. SEMI AUTO PCP



FEATURES
PRESSURE GAUGE
CARBON FIBRE TANK
ADJUSTABLE POWER
SOFT TOUCH STOCK
AMBI. STOCK

AIR SPEED	MAG CAPACITY	AIR CAPACITY	PRESSURE	WEIGHT	LENGTH
CAL. .177	12	290cc	250 BAR	3 KG	103 CM
CAL. .22	10	290cc	250 BAR	3 KG	103 CM
CAL. .25	9	290cc	250 BAR	3 KG	103 CM
CAL. .30	7	290cc	250 BAR	3 KG	113 CM



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Criminals and guns . . .

“it’s just easy”

John Maxwell

Murders, drive-by shootings and gunfire across Western Sydney, hardly a week seems to go by without another gangland shooting, many attributed to a well-publicised turf war between two rival crime groups. “What can you do, it’s everyday life now,” one neighbour told local TV news. That war intensified after one family joined forces with Australia’s largest outlaw motorcycle gang, the Comancheros, their apparent objective being to dominate Sydney’s lucrative drugs trade.

In a recent outrage two women, one associated with a crime family, were shot dead. This war accounts for a high proportion of Australia’s gun crime and impacts licensed law-abiding sporting shooters who are surely wondering where these criminals

source their firearms, considering what’s involved in legally acquiring one (especially a handgun) under Australia’s gun laws. Now a new study by a group of academics led by Melbourne criminologist Professor David Bright of Deakin University and published in the US sociology journal *Deviant Behaviour* examines that very issue.

Entitled *‘I know a guy and he’s got guns galore: Accessing crime guns in the Australian illicit firearms market’*, Bright and his colleagues visited several jails in New South Wales and South Australia to interview actual criminals (75 of them) and ask how they acquired guns. This is a well-established means of obtaining useful information from the source and perhaps the best example is the Australian Institute of Criminology’s long-running Drug Use

Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) program in which recent arrestees at watchhouses in various cities are asked about their drug use, producing current data about what drugs are on the streets, availability, cost and quality. Interviews are confidential and researchers also seek urine samples to substantiate what they’re hearing.

DUMA was launched in 1999 and highlights longer-term trends in drug use, the most recent 2021 round confirming, unsurprisingly, strong links between methamphetamines and criminal conduct. The meth trade is also associated with gun crime and for this latest study, Bright and his researchers recorded interviews with 74 male and one female prison inmates - all voluntarily and anonymously - in 16 prisons. Subjects were aged 23-78, serving 18 months to life and were variously drug dealers, gang members and armed robbers chosen because of past association with firearms.

So Bright’s study asked the question: Where do criminals lay their hands on guns? The answer is mostly from other criminals, some who’ve amassed caches and specialise in supplying them to fellow crims. Such networks operate on trust and outsiders could only acquire guns from the ‘main man’ after being vouched for by a trusted associate. For some of those interviewed the trusted network revolved around family and community, in some cases that community being drug dealers and outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMCGs).

It’s not for nothing police across Australia target OMCGs, especially through use of



One criminal paid a licensed associate to buy handguns then had them “stolen”.

Firearms Prohibition Orders, so here are some of the interviewees: "My mates grew up with their family, big drug dealers and all that s**t and they used to have guns . . . if I really needed a gun back then I could get one no problem. These days it's just easy." Another: "If you knew somebody it [acquiring a firearm] wouldn't be hard. If you know someone who knows someone that can vouch for you, you'd get it."

"I know a guy and he's got guns galore, in stock, put away . . . whenever he sees guns he buys them. No matter what it is he'll buy it and put it away. I've gone to him with two AK-47s and he's gone 'Yep, cash right now'." Another: "Honestly, access is easy. I could get access to a gun within an hour of walking out of jail, no problem. I reckon I'd have a gun in my hand within an hour so long as I had the money." And another: "When people know you, like you're not an informant or anything or you've got a good reputation, they sort of want to deal with you and it's easy getting access to guns."

Some interviewees referred to the practice of borrowing firearms, presumably hiring them, for specific activities such as robbery. These could be returned provided they weren't actually fired which demonstrated an appreciation that ballistic information could link guns across crimes, in which case it seems the deal was 'you shoot it, you buy it'. Further, one interviewee noted there was a risk in not knowing a gun's history as it may have been used for murder while another commented on the difference between "real crims" who used guns as tools for a specific purpose and "big gangsters" whose guns (Glocks were mentioned) were only for display or showing off.

So where do criminal armourers acquire their hardware? It seems by all the usual means including the grey market (guns not surrendered in 1996) and theft, which is worrying for licensed shooters as some interviewees specifically targeted rural properties on the basis every farmer had guns, not always properly secured and farm buildings were often unattended. Even gun safes weren't completely secure as with time and tools they could be forced open or the entire safe removed.

And there's more. Criminals also acquire firearms through 'straw purchases' that involve licensed shooters providing guns

which are subsequently 'stolen' in a staged break-in. One interviewee described acquiring guns from a friend with a firearms licence then coaching that friend on what to say if police inquired about their whereabouts.

Another described how he'd pay an associate with no criminal record to acquire a handgun licence and handguns, saying: "I'll pick 10 specific guns, top of the line, all good handguns, expensive ones and have them go through everything, buy a safe for a thousand bucks, have their pistol licence approved and as soon as they order the guns I go there and stage a break-in." For this the licensed owner will be paid \$20,000 in total while the criminal then markets them to associates for \$20,000 each.

What appears to be an emerging issue is criminal acquisition of firearms online, either the conventional internet or less accessible underground 'dark net'. Apocryphal stories from the US also suggest any dark net site advertising automatic weaponry is almost certainly an FBI sting intended to attract wannabe terrorists. Ordering on the internet will still require getting the item to Australia by mail or freight and Australian Border Force officers have proven very effective at detecting such contraband.

Bright says their data reinforced the notion there was a small but growing firearms market on the internet but most illicit gun sales and trades occurred between individuals where face-to-face relationships have already been established, noting: "... for those who are criminally connected or more deeply embedded in criminal milieus obtaining illicit firearms is, irrespective of law enforcement and extensive state regulation of such, a fairly straightforward matter."

Bright's paper notes Australia has a highly regulated firearms market with licensing of owners and national gun registration which had driven illegal markets further underground to be governed more than ever by the criminal code. That means never snitching, never dealing with anyone who hadn't been vetted or vouched for, never talking to outsiders and definitely not police. Yet criminals can still access guns with shootings in Sydney and Melbourne attesting to that.



Accessing illegal firearms within an hour of leaving prison is "no problem" according to one criminal interviewed.

What's not clear from Bright's interesting study is just how current the information gathered by him and his researchers is. Interviews were conducted between October 2015 and December 2018 though some interviewees may have been discussing situations which prevailed years earlier. In the meantime police have launched task forces targeting gun crime and made increasing use of firearms prohibition orders.

Criminals will steal guns wherever and whenever the opportunity presents. The Australian Institute of Criminology's latest study of firearm theft found there were 2425 guns stolen in 847 reported incidents in 2018 alone, a 35 per cent increase in a decade, most of them rifles, shotguns and airguns with handguns at just five per cent. Licensed shooters can do their bit to keep firearms out of the hands of the criminal fraternity (and protect their valuable property) by ensuring guns are properly secured in quality safes when not in use. Oh, and don't leave the keys lying around where they could be found by an intruder. ●



Mini marvel

Thomas Tabor likes a GPS
in the palm of his hand

Bushnell learned decades ago that given the choice, most GPS users choose simple over complicated as for them what's most important is being able to find their way out of the bush as safely as possible. The company took those wishes to heart years ago when they developed their BackTrack GPS and that first easy-to-use offering took on the somewhat unusual shape of a cylindrical disc about 7.5cm in diameter.

For effortless access to the unit some owners would use the supplied lanyard to hang it around their neck and while that unit performed its duties fairly well when facing modest tasks, like finding a stationary vehicle in a large car park, in my opinion it was just a little too rudimentary and not ideal for Outback use. Yet Bushnell continued their efforts to produce a small GPS which better targeted the needs of hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts without being too large and overly complex and I believe they've hit paydirt with their not-so-complicated and not-so-basic BackTrack Mini. While this particular GPS doesn't possess all the features of some other units it still allows you to monitor your travels and store those routes for future access.

Starting out

It'll be necessary to do some initial minor programming to the BackTrack Mini including setting it to your local time-zone, whether you want that time displayed on a 12 or 24-hour basis, temperature in Celsius or Fahrenheit, data in either Imperial or metric format and so on but these are easily done and once set can be forgotten about. The unit is powered by a built-in rechargeable battery charged using a standard (non-Apple/Lightning) mobile phone cable which comes supplied. Bushnell says the Mini can operate up to 24 hours on a full charge and I found recharging to be relatively quick.

While a rechargeable GPS is less costly to operate than having to replace batteries, in some situations this could pose a potential problem. A dead battery isn't much good to anyone if you have no way to recharge it so if you typically face long stints outdoors and you're relying on your BackTrack Mini GPS to guide you out safely, I strongly recommend some sort of auxiliary charging system like a portable power bank or small solar charger. Bushnell sell a tiny roll-up solar screen charger which might be appropriate in some instances.

Features and function

There's a price to pay with any small electronics and in this case that comes largely in the form of its tiny 6.4cm screen. With my ageing eyesight I sometimes found it a little difficult to read its display without my reading glasses though I did find the convenient back-light function helped greatly in this. But when it comes to convenience the Mini's small size allows it to be stored and carried in virtually any shirt, trouser or jacket pocket and when you attach the nylon tether and carabiner you can even hang it from your belt loop or dangle it from a backpack.

The whole thing is controlled by just four operational buttons, two each on the left and right. The 'on/off' button is top left and self-explanatory, to do so you hold it for three seconds and when starting this activation process a countdown appears after which the screen will display the date, time and temperature along with other useful information. In order for the Mini to function properly it must lock on to available satellites and the best way to achieve that is to be outdoors, free of major obstructions. Usually this only takes a few moments by



The Bushnell BackTrack Mini is one of the smallest and lightweight GPSs ever made.

holding it as level as possible in your hand and as it searches for satellites, a progress bar will appear at the bottom of the screen then disappear as it finds them (in most cases this takes just moments).

Lower left houses the 'screen/select' button which lets you toggle through the various choices and make a selection. It also doubles to access the trip mode and to enter that you again hold the button for a couple of seconds then you can access previously stored trips, begin a new trip, delete a stored trip and various other things. Top right you'll find the 'up/light' button to access your selections as well as activating the screen backlight function which you turn on by holding the button for a couple of seconds and lastly the 'down' button on the lower right lets you make screen choices.

Barometric pressure, elevation, temperature readings, sunrise and sunset times as well as digital compass readings are also available and by setting up a Bushnell account and downloading the app even more options are available. When an active trip is under way the path you've taken appears on the screen as a simple line with your present location marked by a circle with a plus sign in the centre and the starting point showing as a house-shaped icon with the number 1 next to it (location coordinates are also displayed).

Along the way if you wish to highlight a particular spot for future reference you can do so using one of the 18 available waypoint markers and in order to always show your entire route on the screen that image will automatically shrink as your trip progresses. When it comes time to turn the Mini off, follow the same procedure you used to boot it up by holding the upper left button for a few seconds until the 'Goodbye!' message appears on screen. This time lapse feature to deactivate is

likely a safeguard against the unit being accidentally turned off while being handled or carried.

Backtracking with the Mini

Unlike many GPS models the BackTrack Mini doesn't include the typical 'go-to' feature but does have a couple of ways to track your travels. To ensure you don't become an Outback casualty, I found the most reliable of those was starting a new trip then leaving the GPS activated and tracking your movements on your entire trip. In this way the GPS shows the route you've taken in addition to present location and starting point so when it's time to head back you can follow that same trail in reverse or cut across and intersect the path.

The way I see it

The Bushnell BackTrack Mini does come with some limitations, most of which are tied to its small size. The fact it's equipped with a rechargeable power source as opposed to throwaway batteries could be considered either a positive or a negative and I like the fact I don't have to buy batteries, though that could also mean the battery may unexpectedly die on you at the worst possible time.

It's been said the BackTrack Mini had to pass a test of being dropped from two metres on a concrete floor without damage and that being the case as well as 100 per cent waterproof should assure the user it can handle harsh Aussie conditions well. If you're after a GPS with lots of bells and whistles the Bushnell BackTrack Mini may not be your best but if you want a basic, small, ruggedly built and fully waterproof version that won't weigh you down - or cost an arm and a leg - this could be perfect. Distributed by NIOA. ●



Starting point of the trip is shown by a house icon and current location with a circle and plus sign.



Specifications:

Manufacturer: Bushnell
Model: BackTrack Mini GPS
Display resolution: 128 x 128 pixels, transfective colour TFT
Display size: 6.4cm (2.25")
Weight: 54g (1.9oz), with tether and carabiner 95g (2.3oz)
Height: 6.5cm (2.56")
Width: 5cm (1.95")
Depth: 2.5cm (0.98")
Country of manufacture: Taiwan
Price: RRP about \$145

Quick on the draw

As Sam Garro discovers, this gunstock maker's a man of many talents



Ross casts an expert eye over a completed rifle stock.

You might know Ross Waghorn of Waghorn Custom Stocks for his highly crafted and aesthetically pleasing gunstocks. It's a profession he has built and fostered with a strong client base for more than 50 years but you may not be aware of his other, less obvious talent, as a fine art drawer and painter of predominantly animal and wildlife subjects with a more recent focus on raptors - birds of prey.

This tireless artisan still works his magic by transforming high-grade timber blanks into unique masterpieces and while his gunstock work continues on a more easy-as-you-go basis he's gradually transitioning to artwork, a talent he's nurtured since childhood. By comparison, sketching with a pencil or caressing the canvas with a paintbrush to produce portraits, scenery and various other works is far less arduous than gunstock making but still comes with its own unique set of challenges. Artistic pieces are especially rewarding when the recipient demonstrates a real appreciation so we're likely to see more of his art coming to the fore.

Ross continues an artistic trend like those before him including noted big game author and wildlife artist John Guille Millais (*A Breath from the Veldt* - first published 1895) among others, another keen hunter who drew and painted wildlife scenes to record the animals' features, habitual traits and occasionally their unique antics in natural surroundings.

Artistic talent

That passion as a fine gunstock maker has always prevailed while his artwork has remained subdued and like many of us consumed by the demands of life and work, what we'd prefer to pursue most often is pushed aside or deferred until circumstances change. To ensure the correct gunstock design and proportions are achieved in accordance with the client's requirements and fit, an exacting pencil sketch of the stock is drawn, a crucial first step before transferring the form to a

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Bushmeister BA-X12 Synthetic 12ga 20", lever release shotgun, cased 5 chokes..... \$970.00



Bushmeister BA-X12 Synthetic 12ga 28", lever release shotgun, cased 5 chokes..... \$970.00



Bushmeister BA-X12 Tactical 12ga 20", lever release shotgun, cased 5 chokes..... \$1080.00
Bushmeister BA-X12 Walnut 12ga 28", lever release shotgun, cased 5 chokes \$1010.00
Adler A110 12ga 20", Synthetic 5 shot, lever action shotgun \$890.00
Adler B220 12ga 22" Rifled BBL, Synthetic pistol grip stock, 7 shot, straight pull shotgun \$795.00
Adler B220 Walnut 12ga 20", 7 shot straight pull shotgun \$680.00
Adler B220 Walnut 12ga 28", 7 shot straight pull shotgun \$680.00
Adler B220PG 12ga 20", Synthetic pistol grip stock, 7 shot straight pull shotgun \$620.00
Adler B230T FDE 12ga 20", Tactical straight pull shotgun, 2x5 shot detachable mags \$750.00
Akkar 12ga 30", U/O Sporter shotgun silver action, Turkish walnut stock, 5 chokes, cased \$1220.00
Akkar 812 12ga 30", U/O Sporter shotgun black action, Turkish walnut stock, 5 chokes, cased \$1220.00
Akkar Trap 12ga 30", Turkish walnut stock, 5 chokes, cased \$1320.00
ATA Pro 12ga 30", U/O Sporter, grade 2 Turkish walnut, adjustable stock, 3x extended chokes, cased \$1750.00

HANDGUN SPECIALS

Ruger KNR5 Single six 5.5", stainless 22lr/22magnum revolver \$1095.00
Ruger GP100 357 stainless 4", 7 shot revolver \$1370.00
Ruger MKIV512 22lr 5.5" pistol \$870.00
Springfield 1911 Ronan, 9mm stainless/black pistol \$1595.00
Springfield 1911 Loaded Target, 9mm stainless pistol \$1970.00
Springfield 1911 Ronin Target, 9mm stainless/black pistol \$1830.00



Springfield XD-M Elite, 9mm pistol with 3x 10rnd mags \$1220.00

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Ruger American Rimfire 22LR Synthetic Blue 10 shot rifle \$595.00
Ruger American Rimfire 22LR OD Green 10 shot Rifle \$695.00
Ruger American Rimfire 22MAG Synthetic Blue 10 Shot Rifle \$595.00
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Ruger Precision Rimfire 22LR BB Fixed Stock 10 shot Rifle \$995.00
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Ruger American 270WIN Synthetic Blue Rifle \$760.00
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Quick on the draw

timber blank and starting the process.

Ross's artistic ability, as touched on in a previous *Australian Shooter* article on his gunstock making, stems back to early childhood drawing cartoon characters and whatever caught his interest, progressing in later years to charcoal, pastel and oil paintings. He regards the different applications of gunstock making, relief woodcarving and fine art to be all interwoven in a common thread and as a master craftsman that talent and attention to detail shines through in his work.

To achieve the right outcome in drawings and paintings he'll study the animal or bird involved at length, consider how to best position the subject matter and balance accompanying elements such as trees, shrubbery and landscape for effect then study it further until he's satisfied, sketching outlines along the way before applying the first brush stroke.

More than one preliminary painting is often made to ensure the colours are right so time and patience have become friends he has learned to embrace if the desired result is to be achieved, though sometimes there never seems to be enough time and patience is often tried when things don't go to plan.

Wildlife portraits

While Ross in the past has painted landscapes along with various animal and bird subjects like magpies, pelicans, wombats, horses and wild deer his focus at the moment is on raptors, birds of prey such as



The artist with a photographed wedge-tailed eagle and oil painting recently sold.

the falcon, hawk, kite and eagle for which he has great admiration. As a hunter he's inspired and shares connectivity with these superlative unmatched stealth hunters of the sky using their acute eyesight, unrivalled skill on the wing and precision game targeting.

Camera equipment

As a perfectionist Ross has invested in higher-end digital SLR cameras and lenses, his present combination being a Canon EOS 70D with Tamron SP 150-600mm

ultra-telephoto lens he's found effective for capturing fine definition, clear features and often vibrant colours of the animals and birds he intends to sketch or paint.

Whether trekking through promising countryside or out on a hunt his camera and lens, bulky pieces of equipment, accompany him most of the time as he never knows when an opportunistic moment might present itself like an eagle feeding on carrion, an aerial shot of a circling kite or a hawk hovering over a homestead as depicted in one of his paintings. Camouflage and stealth staking is called for at times to move closer to the subject, especially with birds of prey which can spot game or movement from atop a tall tree or rocky ledge.

Why wildlife?

As responsible hunters we harvest wild game for the table, toil and strive for that elusive trophy animal, enjoy the freedom of the outdoors and apart from feral game-culling scenarios we take enough and leave the rest to ensure their ongoing survival. Historically the first conservation and game management programs were instigated by hunters to ensure the survival of diminishing or threatened species, a further connectivity with nature.

The Selous Game Reserve (now Nyerere National Park in Tanzania) was established in honour of Frederick Courteney Selous, a professional hunter and conservationist who, along with former US President Theodore Roosevelt, was responsible for



Magpie painting.

the establishment of many federal bird sanctuaries, national forests and game reserves. They're just two keen hunters and key figures, among others, who championed the cause and admired the game hunted and a similar outlook is supported by our own conservation sporting and shooting bodies.

Memories are treasured but having a picture or painting which expresses so much and helps relive the moment is priceless. I've accumulated countless photos of all manner of wildlife with enlargements hanging on my den wall, simply because they're a wonder of nature and make me feel connected to the sport I derive so much pleasure from. I expect this is something felt and shared by most hunters including Ross, hence his strong propensity to capture them on canvas - a standout painting by Ross would be perfectly at home in any game room.

Hunter connectivity

The first discovered cave paintings in southern France and Spain depicted various antelopes, bovines and hunting scenes and was a hunter's way of capturing what he connected to. Today, fine gunrooms as

described for example in the volumes of *Great Hunters: Their Trophy Rooms and Collections* display one or more paintings of majestic wildlife such as African plains game, predating cats, pachyderm and game from other places.

From a young age, imagery and paintings of hunting scenes such as *The Monarch of the Glen* by Sir Edwin Landseer portraying a magnificently antlered red stag or a home-steadier with shotgun or rifle slung over the shoulder with a few rabbits for the pot, always captured my imagination as I aspired to one day be a successful hunter. Hunter collectables, as with paintings, are all part of the hunting scene that makes us feel connected.

Art shows and commissions

In the past Ross's artwork has been displayed at venues such as the Old Post Office Seymour, The Hut Gallery-Ferntree Gully Arts Society and Mornington Art Show. Demand for his pencil drawings and oil paintings has steadily grown with other personal works of wildlife such as a wombat, magpie and dingo quickly snapped up by appreciative buyers. His most recent sale was of a majestic wedged-tailed eagle

perched on a branch which attracted several admirers, leading him to consider a limited run of signed prints.

For the future

As the gradual transition from gunstock making to fine art takes hold Ross is hoping for a more leisurely existence, time for a bit more hunting, wildlife photography and capturing those special images on canvases. He's still receptive to painting client pet portraits and other commissioned work alongside his quest to paint wildlife, in particular portraits of different raptors in their element with prey in their talons.

Having experienced and traversed the Top End many years ago, he's also looking forward to a return trip for a buffalo hunt and reunion with some old friends. I'm sure he'll also be shouldering his camera to capture an amazing array of animal and bird life in and around the numerous billabongs and flood-plains from brumbies, buffaloes and crocs to whistling kites, hawks and the majestic white-bellied sea eagle. If you're interested or would like to enquire about Ross's artwork he can be contacted on (03) 9779 0318 or email ross@rosswaghorn.com ●





Glory days: Mike Papps as an Australian Olympian.

Mike Papps: Much more than a champion shooter

Michael Francis Papps' long and illustrious life had always revolved around the shooting sports, his childhood in suburban Adelaide in the 1930s and '40s typical of many at the time. His introduction to shooting at age seven was by way of the air rifle and encouragement from his father Leo, owner of a firearms business, while at school the sport was further encouraged and Mike competed in many Cadet shoots with great success.

During school years pistol shooting became his main interest and when it was announced that Melbourne would host the 1956 Olympic Games, he and brother Peter went to work on honing their skills with the aim of being selected for the Rapid Fire event. As South Australians the brothers had a major advantage as SA and Tasmania were the only states shooting regular international target pistol events competitively.

As a 24-year-old Mike made it to the elimination shoots for both the Rapid Fire and Small Bore rifle events for the

Melbourne Games but didn't make either squad, though in the Rapid Fire eliminations he missed a scoring ring by 3mm and had he made that shot he'd have been shooting alongside his 16-year-old brother Peter in the Australian team.

Yet Mike did go on to represent Australia on six occasions at Rome, Cairo, Tokyo, Wiesbaden, Jamaica and Phoenix. He varied his shooting interests and in the year before the 1960 Rome Olympics, now Army reservist Captain Papps of the 3/9 Mounted Rifles was a seven-time South Australian finalist in the Queen's Medal for rifle shooting and at the Rome Games finished in 31st place with a score of 569 out of 600.

At the 1962 World Championships in Cairo, Mike shot both Centrefire and Rapid Fire but had to wait another two years for his next Olympic call-up. Just prior to the Tokyo Games in 1964 he set two Australian records in Rapid Fire (586) and Centrefire (578) and at the Tokyo showpiece placed in the top 20 with a score of 582. At the World Championships two years later in Wiesbaden, Germany he placed 16th in Rapid Fire with a score of 586, the same as the national record he'd set two years earlier.

Indeed 1966 was a big year for international competition and Mike went from one side of the world to the other winning the silver medal in Rapid Fire at the Commonwealth Games in Jamaica with 578. Not content with just shooting Rapid Fire at those Games he also competed in Free Pistol, scoring 511 for a top 10 place and repeated that in Centrefire with a score of 561. Mike's last international appearance was at the World Championships in Phoenix, Arizona.

During and after his time on the national and international stage, Mike made a huge contribution to the shooting sports in this country, not just involving himself with various committees, but also working at the grassroots level of the sport while being a much-loved family man who also ran the family business, Frontier Arms. Throughout his 90 years he amassed countless close friends worldwide but Mike Papps was more than a sporting champion, he was a genuinely lovely guy and a thorough gentleman who'll be sorely missed. -

Rod Pascoe

Thomas' favourite .375 H&H Mag hunting rifle is this Winchester Model 70 Super Express with a Leupold VX-II 3-7x scope.



Time traveller

.375 H&H a cartridge for the ages, says Thomas Tabor

New cartridges seem to be appearing on the market almost monthly. Obviously at the heart of all these offerings is a desire

by manufacturers to sell more firearms and ammunition and I'm intrigued by anything fresh in the industry, but anyone tempted to buy a rifle chambered for one of these

modern cartridges, which hasn't yet proved itself, is essentially gambling on that cartridge's ability to survive.

There really are no guarantees any of these contemporary cartridges will wind up capturing an adequate amount of interest to ensure their endurance and in the event of failure, not only could manufacturers pull those rifles off the market but in all likelihood the ammunition would disappear as well. I know this from experience, having previously owned a number of these 'flash-in-the-pan' calibres but was fortunate to recognise early on their potential demise and sold those rifles while they still had marketable value.

There was one exception though - a rifle I'm simply not willing to part with - a fine and fairly expensive Kimber chambered for the little .17 Mach 2. I immediately fell in love with both rifle and cartridge before soon recognising the latter's diminishing popularity and when that happened, I started buying up every box of .17 Mach 2 cartridges I could find and have enough stockpiled to last both my lifetime as well as any offspring who'll be lucky enough to inherit the rifle. But that was a costly undertaking which many would be uncomfortable duplicating and for those shooters,

Premium lines of .375 H&H hunting cartridges are offered by many manufacturers, loaded with top-performing hunting bullets.



Handloaders have a vast array of .375 bullets to choose from.



as well as the vast majority in general, it's probably best to stick with cartridges which have already proved themselves.

When older is better

Many new cartridges arriving on the market are sold on the pretence of higher velocities and the promise of better field performance but as many experienced hunters know, higher velocities don't always equate to a higher degree of functioning. The .375 H&H Magnum is the perfect example of such a cartridge. When compared on paper its performance may appear to pale against some of the newer magnums - but that's only on paper. Having long since passed its centenarian status it continues to be acclaimed as one of the truly great hunting cartridges.

A bit of history

Introduced in 1912 by famous London gunmaker Holland & Holland, the .375 H&H Mag quickly achieved a loyal following, particularly on the Dark Continent or wherever big and tough game

chose to roam. In the beginning it was likely sold as a 'dangerous game' cartridge but almost immediately its true value as a do-it-all became evident. Not only did it prove an excellent choice when going after beasts with a propensity to eat, stomp or gore their pursuers, it showed itself to be equally efficient on smaller game too and that flexibility of use survives wherever hunters face a diverse range of game.

Originally the .375 was loaded with British Cordite black powder of that era, the name coming from the powder's spaghetti-like strands or 'cords' produced in the extrusion process. But under certain circumstances Cordite would become unstable, particularly in tropical regions as the sweltering heat could be responsible for driving chamber pressures higher and becoming unpredictable. In some cases that resulted in sticky actions, stock damage and even injuries to the shooter. By the early part of the 20th century Cordite was gradually being replaced by significantly better-functioning smokeless varieties of powder which were more stable, less corrosive and



The .375 H&H (right) pales when compared to the real big bores (from left) 8 Bore, 600 Nitro Express and .505 Gibbs.

produced more uniform results overall.

But not all cartridges made the transition from black powder to smokeless smoothly as some rifles couldn't sustain the increased chamber pressures which often accompanied smokeless varieties of powder. Yet the .375 H&H was an exception and made that crossover seamlessly and effortlessly, due in part to the large powder capacity of its case which encouraged the use of slower-burning smokeless propellants.

In performance

Few shooters would be so bold as to compliment the .375 H&H on its outward appearance, its long, tapering case and gentle angling shoulder reminding me of an ancient monarch trying to compete in a world of modernistic designs. But just because it's not a 'pretty' cartridge doesn't mean the .375 H&H Mag has anything to be ashamed of.

This bullet took an African eland and retained 65 per cent of its original weight.



The .375 H&H Magnum is accurate as shown by this 3-shot group at 100 yards handloaded with Norma 300-grain .375 Oryx bullets.



.375 H&H Ballistics

Cartridge Bullet Wt. (grains)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	100 yards Velocity (fps)	200 yards Velocity (fps)	300 yards Velocity (fps)	Muzzle Energy (ft-lb)	100 yards Energy (ft-lb)	200 yards Energy (ft-lb)	300 yards Energy (ft-lb)	Trajectory * 300 yards (inches/cm)
270-grain SP	2690	2420	2160	1920	4340	3505	2805	2215	-9.6" (-24cm)
300-grain SP	2530	2270	2020	1790	4265	3425	2720	2135	-11.1" (-38cm)

* Trajectory with a 200-yard zero
Reference: Federal Premium Data

Most don't consider the .375 a true 'big bore' but rather an intermediary cartridge and with trajectory similar to that of the 30-06, I'd place them both in the same category as '300-metre rounds'. That doesn't necessarily mean their capabilities are limited only up to 300m, it only suggests that within that range trajectory drop is fairly flat and easy to allow for.

These two cartridges also share roughly the same velocities, even out to that 300m range yet the real difference shows up in the retained energy levels they're able to produce which substantially favours the .375 over those of its smaller cousin. The 300-grain bullet is often considered standard fare for use in the .375 H&H Mag, particularly when going after larger animals though lighter-weight bullets like 270-grainers add a bit more flexibility of use, particularly on smaller species.

There will always be some variation in results between different bullets even of the same weight, but my own testing has shown both 270 and 300-grain bullets generally share a similar propensity for good accuracy. But it's important to note these differences in weight will generally result in different impact points, making it impractical to switch back and forth in the field without the need to readjust your rifle sights.

My .375 experience

I've used my .375s for hunting a wide variety of game and was once chasing moose with a custom Ruger No. 1 .375 H&H single-shot when an unexpected trophy quality mule deer presented itself and one shot later it was on the ground. During that hunt a nice paddle-headed moose fell victim to the same rifle.

I also took another of my .375 H&Hs on safari to Africa for an eland hunt which resulted in harvesting a massive bull weighing almost a ton, again with a single-shot. Placing the bullet just behind the shoulder at about 100m, the 270-grain Nosler AccuBond did its job perfectly as the bullet penetrated both lungs, took out a

A typical comparison of performance (30-06 vs. .375 H&H Mag)

Cartridge/Performance	30-06 – 180-grain soft-point			
	Muzzle	100 yards	200 yards	300 yards
Velocity (fps)	2700	2470	2250	2050
Retained energy (ft-lb)	2915	2440	2025	1670
Downrange trajectory		+5cm	0.0	-23cm

Cartridge/Performance	.375 H&H Magnum – 270-grain soft-point			
	Muzzle	100 yards	200 yards	300 yards
Velocity (fps)	2690	2420	2160	1920
Retained energy (ft-lb)	4340	3505	2805	2215
Downrange trajectory		+6cm	0.0	24cm

Reference: Federal Premium Data

couple of ribs along the way and was found just under the skin on the far shoulder. It had penetrated almost a full metre of hide, flesh, muscle and bone and still retained 65 per cent of its original weight.

The way I see it

Many cartridges come and go with some promising good ballistic execution but the key word here is 'promising'. A few of these eventually prove their worth in the field but none have the established track

record the .375 H&H Magnum still enjoys. During its 11 decades of success in virtually every imaginable hunting scenario, the .375 continues to be valued as one of the best overall hunting cartridges ever made. But what sets it apart from many of its competitors is its flexibility as in my opinion it may well be the perfect choice if you like pursuing pigs or even deer in the Outback and if you encounter much larger game, like a big gnarly buffalo, the .375 H&H Magnum could be ideal. ●



To snare that trophy stag
you must first learn how
to track him.



Track record

Rich Hungerford has tips for hunters on how to assess the age of 'sign'

In a world far more primitive than the one we live in today, early humans began to expand their ability to discern useful information from the environment around them. Perhaps in visiting a common water source in some remote corner of the African savanna, early hunters noticed animals left marks in the soft mud around the waterholes.

These marks were left most notably by the feet of animals our early ancestors hunted for food and their existence told them their prey was nearby. The marks also warned them of other animals which preyed on humans as well as to the presence of human intruders trespassing on their territory. It likely proved useful knowledge to be able to interpret these tracks and marks and in turn to learn to follow them to hunt for food and avoid danger.

In modern terms we refer to these tracks and marks as 'sign' - a sign that something happened on the piece of ground we're looking down at. The questions are then asked: What passed through, how long ago was it here, which way did it go and where is it now? Many avid hunters can tell you what animals left sign on the ground but what's even more useful to them is estimating how old the tracks are. Were they

made weeks ago, in which case the animals may have long departed, or were they left a matter of hours or days ago?

So let's consider what factors affect the sign after it was made that'll help us place an approximate timeline on the event of its making. Trackers generally agree there are four common factors affecting sign, each of which contributes to the degradation of fresh sign and ultimately returns the disturbed local area back to the baseline conditions which existed before something stood on it and changed that baseline state.

This baseline state is what trackers tune into while studying the expanse of natural environment around them. "What's different from everything else here?" is the trackers' question. Once a track or mark is identified we want to understand how long it's been there in conjunction with the questions posed above. The first of four factors affecting sign is time itself as obviously the longer a piece of sign exists on the ground the more progressed it is in terms of returning to a baseline state.

Terrain is the second factor and by terrain we refer to the canvas upon which the sign is left. Trackers refer to this as the substrate - is that canvas a soft surface such as clay or mud which easily retains

the imprint of an animal's foot-fall or is it a hard surface which only allows the passing creature's foot to compress and compact the substrate into a flat and crushed texture? An area covered in a thick layer of leaf mulch would be an example of such a substrate while disturbance of rocks from their baseline position in other cases may represent the sign we see most clearly.

Thirdly, as trackers we become acutely aware of the weather as rain, wind and sun all serve to erode the piece of sign we're observing through the processes of drying, collapsing and erasing it until it returns to that pre-disturbed state. In knowing what the weather was like over preceding days we can determine how much these processes have impacted upon and consequently aged the sign.

The fourth and final factor affecting sign is that made by others passing through the same location and whose sign has overlayed that which we're concerned with and may take the form of animals and birds using the same location or even people and vehicles walking and driving over it.

When combining each of these factors we can begin to reasonably estimate the passage of time which a track or mark has been subject to. Of course it's not always

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Track record

that black and white and practice makes perfect our reliable estimation of that unknown quantity. Notably, sign left in substrates such as clay and mud in covered positions may persist for extended periods and must be considered in the context of all the other observations made by the tracker, this accumulation of observations referred to as the 'track story'.

Working through these forms part of the art of the tracker. There are two primary methods trackers use to assess how long a piece of sign has been exposed to the factors described above and thereby judge how much time has passed since the sign was left, these two methods being 'comparison' and 'bracketing' and most trackers use both concurrently to give themselves the best chance of accurately assessing things.

The comparison method makes use of the principle of noting differences in the piece of sign being assessed with a similar mark being made by the tracker on the spot. From the perceivable differences in colour, dryness, crispness, continuity of straight lines or angles and overall definition of the two marks we can make a solid guess around how old the sign is and the more you practise this method of ageing, the more accurate it becomes.

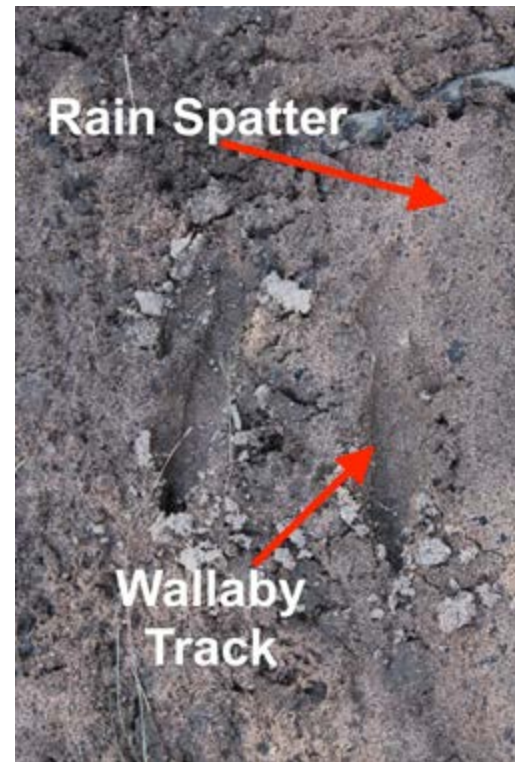
The second method is bracketing and in some circumstances this is by far the most effective technique to obtain a definitive 'time stamp' on sign. As an example, if we know it rained the night before then we know the rain spatter forms a new layer of baseline ageing over the entire area so if tracks are blurred-out and weathered, we can assume they were made before the rain fell. Conversely if the sign is crisp and

defined and made into the rain spattered substrate, we can safely assume it was made after the rain and by noting when the rain stopped we can do the maths to calculate how old the sign is.

We can obtain similar bracketing effects from other known events such as noting when vehicles or pedestrians have been in an area and, just like the factors affecting sign discussed previously, trackers take all available data into account to build a track story which draws on all discernable information rather than assumptions based on just one piece of the puzzle.

Evidence in this space of both comparison and bracketing sign to determine its age may take the form of tracks themselves including wallows, feeding marks, scats, disturbed or broken vegetation, dislodged sticks and rocks, bruising on exposed roots and rub marks on trees to name but a few. Effectively it all returns to the question: "What was this place like before it was disturbed by the animal which left the marks?" Like a good detective the tracker then puts it all together to estimate the time that's elapsed between the sign being made and the tracker finding it.

Judging the age of sign accurately is perhaps one of the greatest challenges facing trackers and consequently they'll generally explain their observations cautiously. We effectively 'bracket' our language around the sign as well and by this I mean rather than stating a piece of sign was made today at 7am, a good tracker will use language along the lines of "this sign was made 12 to 24 hours ago". As more evidence is gathered to add to the overall track story within which the sign exists,



This wallaby track was made over the top of rain-spattered substrate showing the animal arrived after the rain had ceased.

more specific assessment of the elapsed time can be made and this is good practice to follow as a tracker.

As with all things 'tracking', practice and more practice is key as the longer we spend studying the dirt, mud, leaves, sticks and rocks on the ground where tracks and marks have been captured, the more proficient we become at 'seeing' sign and thus determining how long ago it was made. In determining that elapsed time even in approximate terms, we give ourselves an edge in seeking out and closing-in on our quarry. Being able to both discern and age sign will help us all become more adept hunters and bushmen. While the high-level tracking skills possessed by our ancient ancestors may remain somewhat elusive to us amidst our busy modern lives, the process of tracking will always connect us strongly to nature and immerse us in its wonder. ●

• Rich Hungerford is a combat survival trainer and former SAS Patrol Commander.



A recent deer track visible on the left overlays vehicle tracks made a few days prior.

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The invisible man

Frank Varapodio enjoys a new hunting experience

The RIGID Infrared Light D-Series by Upfitter.

As an avid night hunter, thermal technology has been a gamechanger for spotting but whether with a handheld monocular or scope it can become tiresome on both eyes and the body. Traditional use of spotlights is good fun but ferals can be easily spooked so I was keen to run the rule on the latest RIGID Infrared Light D-Series from Upfitter.

RIGID use special configurations and optics to provide a high-powered and stealthy infrared light source producing a beam of energy that's considered invisible, thus enhancing night vision ability which allows you to see them before they see you. Unpacking the box I was pleasantly surprised by the compact size of the lights at just 3" x 3", well finished in high-grade aluminium alloy with a durable UV resistant powder coat. The lights come with mounting hardware including a U-shaped bracket in stainless steel, harness with switch and Deutsch connector and I had them installed in no time by my local 4x4 fitter.

As with any IR light illuminator you need to pair it with a night vision viewer and there are a number of products on the market whether binoculars, monocular or goggles, each serving their own purpose. Both the binoculars and monocular are great for scoping whereas goggles are hard to beat when either driving or travelling on foot. Buyer beware though, you'll have to stick to 1x magnification or 'objects may seem closer than they really are' and this point is vital to avoid disorientation which can be deadly with firearm in hand.

With the lights fitted I couldn't wait for my first hunt and as night fell we made our way to the first property, acres of vineyards on the south bank of the Murray River with our target being eastern grey kangaroos (permit in hand). All lights were off except the RIGID and using a monocular we could clearly see down the rows in a haze of green. The monocular on its own has limited illumination and view (about 50-70m) but the RIGID increased our viewing distance to at least 300m. It wasn't too long before we spotted three roos about 100m away so we turned the engine off



and waited. They were oblivious to our existence as we set ourselves up for a shot each using our rifle torches and we could spotlight the roos which were clear in our scopes. Two shots, two roos.

For the next hour we managed to take a dozen roos effortlessly with the RIGID light and monocular combo, most of which we'd easily have missed given the viewing limitation of the latter, so we moved to the next property known for rabbits and foxes. Again all lights were off except the RIGID as we scoped the property and spotted a pair of eyes in the distance. Engine off, lights on and the eyes were getting closer, a fox prowling between the saltbush and working his way down-river in search of its next feed. Easily visible in the powerful RIGID light we quietly set ourselves up for the 150m shot, unrushed as the redcoat wasn't spooked and the wind direction certainly helped. Rifle light on and a body shot from the .243 served up an instant kill.

It seemed too easy at this point so we started playing around with the RIGID, monocular and fixed spotlights. We encountered a few more eastern greys but rather than shut down the engine we kept it running even though the targets could sense a presence but were unsure of the exact location. With shooter on standby we hit the spotlight which startled the roos though we still managed to get two shots away for another two kills.

The next night we were after a feed of rabbits so cruised up and down the banks of several properties which are dense with shrubbery and rabbit holes and it wasn't



A 4x4 fitter installed the light in no time.

long before the lights picked up rabbits and hares using the monocular. Engine off and RIGID lights on and through the monocular it was just incredible as we could see them but they couldn't see us. Normally we'd have pushed ourselves towards the target with spotlight and 12-gauge but we were able to sit in silence and with the .22 picked off eight rabbits and four hares in quick time using the torches as spotlights on our rifles.

Driving back to Adelaide we reflected on the hunts and just how different they'd been. There was a sense of calm energy, adrenalin was still there as it always is but the stalk itself was serene with no mad rush to set up a shot and no spotlights flashing in all directions in a bid to identify the next target. It was a different hunting experience but one which certainly has a place alongside the fun of traditional spotlighting or the use of thermal. I can't recommend RIGID and this set-up highly enough and that next hunting trip can't come too quickly. ●



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ADF looks to the future with major upgrades

The Australian Defence Force will be issued with the new SIG Sauer P320 X-Carry Pro.

John Maxwell

The Australian Defence Force is set to acquire a group of modern weapons including a pair of sniper systems, a new shotgun along with a new handgun to replace the venerable Browning self-loading pistol which entered Australian service in 1964. The handgun is a variant of the SIG Sauer P320 which, following extensive trials, was the sidearm chosen by the US military and more recently by Canada.

In Australian service the new SIG Sauer P320 X-Carry Pro will feature a SIG Romeo 2 reflex sight, giving users a substantially improved hit capability and a SIG Foxtrot 2 white-light torch for improved ability in night operation, the pistol selected after a trials program which saw it pitted against such contenders as the familiar and widely-used Glock 17. Defence pondered whether it could live without the traditional safety catch a la Glock before deciding it couldn't so the new handgun comes with a safety. Colour of the new gun is Flat Dark Earth (brown) and in 9mm the SIG P320 magazine holds 17 rounds.

The Browning is one of the world's most widely-used handguns and is renowned for its reliability and effectiveness. Initially

adopted by the Belgian military in 1935 it was named the Browning Hi-Power (or High Power) not because its 9mm cartridge was more powerful than any other 9mm but because its 13-round magazine capacity was almost double that of rivals such as the Luger and Colt 1911.

But technology doesn't stand still. Issue Browning iron sights are minimal, it has no ability to accept accessories such as lights or better sights while modern polymer handguns are lighter with substantially greater magazine capacity but Defence's main problem was that in 2017, FN announced the end of production which meant no more factory support. Other nations had moved on with the British and New Zealand armies adopting the Glock while in 2017 the US Army chose the SIG P320 to replace the Beretta M9, itself selected in 1985 to replace the Colt 1911. So in the period the Browning endured in Australian service, the US Army was on its third handgun.

Traditionally the ADF hasn't regarded the handgun as an important weapon but that changed during operations in Iraq and then Afghanistan with the rise of so-called 'insider attacks'. This was mostly a problem

in Afghanistan as in such attacks, which claimed Australian soldiers' lives, trusted local insiders turned on their allies. That underlined the utility of sidearms as in an insider attack in an office or base setting, a handgun on the hip may be brought to action much quicker than a rifle on a rack in the corner.

With any new defence weapon system comes additional requirements for training and the selection of a reflex sight over traditional iron sights indicates Defence has opted for the capability that'll give soldiers the greatest opportunity to use their new sidearms effectively. Defence will ultimately acquire around 10,000 handguns and while no price has yet been announced, civilian versions typically sell for upwards of \$1000 though with such a large order, Defence can expect to pay much less.

The handgun is just one in a series of new weapons set to enter service through defence project LAND 159 which will be delivered in three tranches until around the end of the decade. The standard issue Steyr EF88 (F90) will be here a while longer though as it has just undergone an extensive refresh and is regarded as good until well into the next decade.

However Tranche 2 does consider a new infantry weapon. With the US recently adopting a new service cartridge (the 6.8 x 51mm), new rifle and light machinegun, Australia will have to think hard about whether to continue with the 5.56 NATO cartridge or move promptly to the new round which will necessitate a suite of new firearms.

It so happens one of the new inclusions in L159 T1 is what the ADF terms a Personal Defence Weapon System, intended to replace the long-serving Heckler and Koch MP5 sub-machinegun. This is mostly a special forces weapon though they're also used by other troops such as naval boarding parties and airfield defence guards. What was sought was a compact firearm for use when a full-sized assault rifle was inappropriate and they opted for the SIG Sauer MCX chambered in the .300 Blackout, a special forces preference as it's more lethal than 9mm with longer range and well suited to use with suppressors. Furthermore, the MCX is more akin to the SF rifle of choice the M4 than is the MP5 and notably the MCX is a relative of the SIG MCX Spear, the arm chosen by the US as its next generation infantry rifle.

Australian soldiers will also receive a new combat shotgun with the Italian Benelli M3A1 selected to replace the venerable Remington 870. The Benelli is widely used overseas including by Canada and New Zealand and can be operated in semi-automatic or pump-action mode and fitted with a red-dot sight and white-light illuminator. In the ADF, shotguns are carried by special forces, naval boarding parties and airfield defence guards as in that latter role



The Accuracy International AX-SR has been chosen as the platform for Long Range Sniper Capability.

a shotgun is considered less likely than an assault rifle to make damaging holes in expensive aircraft.

Defence is acquiring two new precision rifle systems, the British Accuracy International AX-SR for long-range sniper capability and the US Barrett M107A1 for anti-materiel. Though an anti-materiel rifle can be used against personnel, their primary role is against expensive enemy equipment such as radar systems, aircraft and vehicles. The AX-SR is essentially the rifle AI developed for the Advanced


Sniper Rifle Program for the US Special Operations Command which lost out to the US Barrett Multi-role Adaptive Design (MRAD) but apparently not by much. The AX-SR is a multi-calibre system which can be readily adapted to fire cartridges such as 7.62 NATO, .338 Lapua Magnum and .300 Norma Magnum, the former used primarily for training and the other two for service, depending on operational requirements.

Standard optic is a Nightforce ATACR 7-35x56 scope with add-on Leonardo Improved Night Vision Objective for nocturnal activities with the standard suppressor for this rifle being the US Thunderbeast Arms. The M107A1 fires the 50 BMG cartridge and is a lighter and modernised version of the legacy anti-materiel weapons the Barrett M82 and Accuracy International AW50.

In July 2020 Defence initially contracted Brisbane-based defence company NIOA to conduct market assessment of Tranche 1 items, inviting bids, assessing proposals and making recommendations. In trials, NIOA's weapons and munitions specialists along with Defence experts evaluated 649 products across weapons, ancillaries and munitions for 11 mission systems, the final recommendations contained in a 600-page report. Now NIOA has been contracted to acquire the Tranche 1 items, deliver supporting services for verification and validation, certification and introduction into service and through-life support. ●



The SIG Sauer MCX in .300 Blackout has been selected as the platform for the Personal Defence Weapon System.

A man in camouflage gear, Joe Norris, is standing in a field with a fallow stag Kiwi-style. He is holding a small animal, possibly a possum, in his hands. The background shows a line of trees and a fence. The text is overlaid on the top left of the image.

Joe carries a fallow stag Kiwi-style - note fox tails on the fence as they were shot with a .243 and not suitable to tan the full hide.

Waste not, want not

Harvesting the maximum from target animals just makes sense, says Joe Norris

Anyone who's hunted in North America will be aware the law states all edible meat must be recovered from the target animal which I think is an excellent policy and something we should all aim for. I decided a long time ago to harvest as much meat as possible from any game animal I take, either for food or to make other products from. I hunt deer for the excellent venison they provide but still try to take old mature trophy stags if the opportunity arises. This doesn't mean I leave the meat behind from a tough old stag, as prime cuts will always be prime cuts and the rest will make good sausages when mixed with pork or mutton fat.

Unlike in the US and Canada where they have hunting seasons which coincide with the colder months, we can hunt almost year-round in most states. Unless a sambar is taken on fringe country it usually isn't possible to recover the animal whole, so depending on distance and time of year there isn't always time to remove all the meat before spoilage occurs.

Sometimes a bit of wastage is unavoidable, particularly in warmer months, but that doesn't mean I don't try to put all the meat on ice as quickly as possible, it's just there's only so much you can carry at once. With smaller species like chital and fallow it's often possible to cart the whole animal out and I like to use the Kiwi method of making the animal into a backpack as I find I can manage a lot more weight that way.

Deer hides make excellent trophies in their own right so I often tan these for rugs, especially fallow and chital with their striking spotted hides. I like to use the tanning kits made by Pizzari (available on the internet) as the leather comes out white and is easy to soften if the instructions are followed. My youngest daughter was after a vest made of chital hide and the back half of a big stag which had been caped for a shoulder mount provided the necessary material.

A long time ago I decided I'd try to teach myself taxidermy with the help of various books and advice from people like David Luxford and Mal Burton. While I've managed

to create some mounts I'm proud of, a lot of my early attempts weren't too clever and I have some deer which look more like goats but practice makes perfect, though I don't consider myself a professional taxidermist by any stretch. I try to save the capes of any mature stag I shoot for possible future mounts or just as spares, while pigs too small to mount are caped anyway for practice unless we decide to scald them and butcher them properly for the table.

During the process of learning taxidermy I found there were often other parts of the animal that could be used as well as the traditional trophy. As an example I made a mould so I could mount the back end of a boar, thus creating a "pig's arse" mount which are always in demand for man-caves and home bars, so another part of the pig is used and not just its head and tusks.

The meat from big boars is usually cooked for the dogs and with younger pigs processed for the table, very little is wasted. Deer feet can be made into gun/bow racks (not that we're able to display our guns any more) while pig tusks can be mounted on a board if you don't want a shoulder mount done. Deer skulls make good European mounts as do most horned animals although your other half may not appreciate them on the walls. I'm fortunate in that my wife doesn't object to me having them on the walls of one of our spare rooms.





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Waste not, want not

I like to keep any winter fox skins as they make good furs and I've tanned quite a few wild dog skins for people but as both wild dogs and foxes attract bounties in some districts, unless the finished product brings in more than the bounty it may not be worth doing though either way I don't scorn the change to value-add and use the animal. I keep any cast antlers I find as they're a trophy on their own in my opinion and also provide material for antler repairs and knife handles. I used a red deer cast antler to put a handle on a broken hand shear blade to make a knife with the coronet left on the end of the handle and while the knife's far too big for carrying, it makes a good utility item around camp. I did try bone carving but must admit I have next to no artistic ability so gave it away in fear of ridicule.

Rabbits are used as table fare if I'm good enough to head shoot them and my father has some really good recipes for them, including a delicious Kentucky fried rabbit. I've yet to find a good use for feral cats but that doesn't stop me shooting them whenever the chance presents itself and while it may seem I'm being a tad mercenary here, it's just that I believe we should be using as much of the animals we harvest as possible to keep wastage to an absolute minimum. ●



A young sambar stag taken in fringe country and recovered whole to hang for a few days.



Hairy pig's rear.

Joe's daughter Jessica practises her caping skills on a pig used for a mount.



Joe's trophy wall.



Simple vest made from the back end of a deer hide after the front was used for taxidermy.



More home-tanned hides.



A camp knife made from an old hand shear blade and cast antler.

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Sue-Ann sends a shot to the 600-yard target. Note bullet in flight just forward of the muzzle.

Matchmaker

Handloader Chris Redlich was pleasantly surprised by Sellier & Bellot factory ammo



A comparison of the long 77-grain projectile and 55-grain bullet. Specs are printed on the box.

Inspired by what some would describe as obsessive compulsive is my pursuit of maximising accuracy through handloading and I generally avoid buying factory ammo unless it's a last resort. Recently I had the good fortune of reviewing a new Tikka T3x Varmint Hunter in .223 Rem but the rifle's barrel twist of one-in-8 wasn't enough to stabilise the lighter 50 and 55-grain bullets of my .223 handloads, so Beretta Australia responded to my concern of correct bullet weight and supplied me with the latest Sellier & Bellot (S&B) Precision Rifle factory ammunition.

The 77-grain bullets are suitable for a fast-twist barrel such as one-in-8 (one turn in 8") and being precision match loads are ideal to test in a purpose designed long-range rifle such as the T3x Varmint Hunter. Although a well-established manufacturer with a long history, the Sellier & Bellot name isn't as familiar to myself or my shooting peers as other renowned brands yet my experience with their factory ammo wasn't as foreign to me as I thought.

A 'last resort' situation arose a few years back when I needed brass to reload for my .303 Sporter and because .303 brass for whatever reason at the time happened to be in short supply, the gunshop owner suggested I buy some Sellier & Bellot

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Matchmaker

factory rounds then reload the used cases. The price was too good to refuse, the ammo shot well and the brass of such a high standard I'm still reloading those cases today.

S&B ammunition is made in the Czech Republic and the company pride themselves on the highest standard of manufacture and, as with everything specified as 'match ammo', their factory target ammunition is top-notch as I discovered in range testing. The business end of the cartridge is loaded with a 77-grain hollow-point boat-tail match bullet, the boat-tail base of the projectile a common feature on high ballistic coefficient (BC) bullets, important for reduced drag and conducive to long-range performance. For target aficionados the 77-grain projectile has a G7 BC of 0.193 which translates to 'long bullet' for .224 diameter and I'm no mathematical ballisticsian (the specifications are printed on the box). Most ammunition manufacturers now include ballistic specs on their boxes and this is important for consumers looking for ammo that will best suit their rifle.

One thing not disclosed on the box is what type or how much 'coal' they use to fuel the furnace, meaning burning rate of powder and what it takes to power the projectile to greater distances, so to satisfy my curiosity I took matters into my own hands and with an inertia tool safely extracted a bullet from the case. The powder weighed 24.8 grains and was very fine in appearance. Similar to Colonel Sanders' secret '11 herbs and spices', Sellier & Bellot don't divulge their powder recipe but I believe it to be medium-slow burning commonly used to drive larger .224

bullets of 70 to 77 grains (my chronograph recorded muzzle velocity at average speeds of 2920fps).

Interestingly, S&B tested the match ammo from a 51cm barrel which would explain their 2824fps compared to the extra 100fps in my Tikka 60cm barrel. Although not beating any speed comparisons with my lighter .223 hunting loads, velocity at the muzzle end isn't indicative of long-range performance and way down yonder is where the heavier bullets shine. I guess my obsessive compulsion could be blamed for going to such lengths but keen handloaders considering buying factory match ammo may find it as interesting as I did, so with all the research behind me I couldn't wait to test this Precision Rifle ammunition.

At the range

With overall length of 56.6mm the cartridges chambered smoothly in the Tikka T3x Varmint Hunter, sighting-in a swift process with the second and third shots finding zero through almost the same hole at 100m. First impressions of Sellier & Bellot's factory ammunition were impressive and I was confident of a perfect combination between bullet weight and heavy barrel. More importantly the accurate sighting results gave my wife Sue-Ann and I the assurance we needed to rely on the T3x Varmint Hunter at an upcoming long-range shoot.

I couldn't think of a better place to test a factory ammo's long-range performance than at a charity Pink Shoot in support of the National Breast Cancer Foundation. Some may say 500-600 yards is stretching



Superb accuracy at the 500-yard target thanks to Sue-Ann's shooting and the S&B 77-grain match ammo.

the .223 Remington's capability but this Precision Rifle ammo exceeded all expectations. Sue-Ann produced good scores while shooting respectable groups at 300 and 400 yards but then scored even higher at 500 and 600 yards, nailing five V-bulls in a row at the 500-yard mound and many more at 600 to reinforce the 77-grain high BC credentials at extended ranges.

Conclusion

Sue-Ann's target shoot proved the perfect field test for the review rifle and supplied ammunition, with both achieving outstanding results at long range. Sellier & Bellot Precision Rifle ammo proves you can depend on factory ammunition to perform accurately and consistently when every shot counts. Packaged in boxes of 20, the .223 Rem match loads have a competitive recommended retail price of \$43 a box at time of writing with three bullet weights available including 52, 69 and 77-grain (tested). For a full list of available calibres visit www.berettaaustralia.com.au ●



Shooters' new voice in Canberra

Our Media and Politics Officer Rachael Oxborrow
talks to Olympian and politician Dan Repacholi



Man on a mission: Dan Repacholi addresses parliament in Canberra.

As one of Australia's highest profile target shooters Dan Repacholi is now enjoying the new challenge of representing his country in a different way, as the recently-elected Federal Labor Member for Hunter in New South Wales. And in this role the 40-year-old SSAA member has not only taken on the interests of his electorate but those of every law-abiding firearms owner in the country.

"I think it's great we have a shooter representing in parliament who can be a big voice in that side of things," he said. "There are other shooters in parliament of course but being an internationalist with a profile, I can work on changing that stereotypical perception of firearm owners."

Dan was elected Labor Member for Hunter in this year's Federal Election, is a Commonwealth Games triple gold medalist and four-time Olympian and a fitter and turner by trade who runs a machinery sales business in his local area. As one of his first points of call in the firearms arena,

Dan is working with Victorian Nationals Senator Bridget McKenzie to resurrect the Parliamentary Friends of Shooting group.

In the past this group was hugely successful in educating politicians and their staff about firearm ownership, target shooting and hunting while also offering opportunities for fun and educational range trips and field days. In addition to reinvigorating this space Dan is aiming to connect with the flip-side of the debate and change perception further.

"I'm also planning to join the Parliamentary Friends of Gun Control so they can have insight into the difference between legal firearm use in Australia and criminal use," he said. "There's so much common ground in values between both sides and this is a chance to understand each other much better."

Dan feels the current status of firearm laws in Australia should be something we take pride in but says there's always room for advancement. He believes there can be improvements in managing the criminal

element and illegal firearm crime more effectively while allowing law-abiding firearms owners to continue with their hobby, sport and pastime. "We have great laws in Australia and people doing good things," he said.

While his new role may seem a world away from being a fitter and turner or international grade target shooter, Dan says politics was always going to play a big part in his future. "For a long time I've had an interest in joining the local council and trying to become mayor at some stage," he said. "My friends tell me they could see this coming and to be honest it's been interesting and great fun. There aren't too many jobs where you're genuinely trying to help people every day of the week."

Now he's had some time to settle into his new role, Dan's striving to strike a balance between working for the community and maintaining his target shooting interests and hopes to return to regular training with the aim of qualifying for the 2024 Paris Olympics. ●

Getting warmer

Zerofit base-layers kept Ben Unten snug

I'm lucky enough to live in a beautifully cool part of this magnificent country. Of the eight recognised climatic zones in Australia the very northern tips are Zone 1 with their hot and humid summers down to Alpine Zone 8 in Tasmania and the mountains of Victoria. I live in Zone 7 which is unimaginably named 'cool temperate' as in winter we regularly experience weeks at a time when the maximum daytime temperature is in single figures, dropping to minus 5 or 6 overnight (like I said, beautiful!)

As a result of this I reckon I've some pretty comprehensive experience when it comes to 'rugging-up' in cooler weather and with this in mind I was keen to take a look at a couple of offerings from Zerofit, namely the Ultimate and Heatrub Move base-layer garments.

Zerofit was invented by golf-mad Japanese bloke Koji Higashi. Apparently he was frequently cold while playing golf which led him to developing what's described as "advanced active base-layer products", the concept being they provide great warmth while allowing freedom of movement especially when undertaking outdoor activities. Both the Heatrub Move and Ultimate are designated unisex though I found the former fitted me better while my wife wore the Ultimate, the measurements on the website meaning a large would fit both of us.

Heatrub Move

This is designed to provide instant heat with zero sweat and move moisture to the outer shell fabric which allows for fast drying, something it does via its two-layer construction (it was designed for vigorous exercise in cold conditions while minimising perspiration). It's made from 50 per cent polyester, 45 per cent polypropylene and five per cent polyurethane, a combination which allows internal moisture to be drawn away from the skin to the outer polyester layer where it can quickly evaporate.

The Move is comfortable, lightweight and did as claimed in providing instant warmth. On the day of testing the predicted maximum was 11 degrees Celsius and walking our property to check on stock the garment worked well. It was cozy and as the photo shows I wore only wore a light



The Zerofit Ultimate and Move.



The Move fitted Ben better.



The Ultimate was a little snug on Ben.

shirt over the top. I tested the Move on a pig hunt the following weekend and found it extremely windproof on the quad, which was a blessing as temperatures were in low single figures and I was able to remain warm wearing only light camo over-layers.

The Ultimate

This too is made to give instant heat with the extra-long fibres on the inside designed

to create gentle friction against your skin which generates warmth. It's specified as being best for golf, hiking, sailing, motor-cycling, general sports, outdoor events and workwear and is 68 per cent acrylic, nylon (21), wool (7) polyester (2) and polyurethane (2).

The long fibre design means it doesn't have to rely on constriction to create and maintain heat which allows the wearer



greater freedom of movement. This one's more of a snug fit which was well suited to my wife's frame and she completely agreed with the 'instant warmth' claim while also appreciating the fact it was comfortable to wear and easy to wash and dry.

Summary

Zerofit garments are certainly different to the normal base layers we wear and my wife and I found them comfortable and with zero itch. We both felt they were better suited to more casual activities including sitting around the campfire on very cold nights as I tended to sweat when doing more strenuous activities, something exacerbated when I trialed The Ultimate though in fairness I do tend run a bit hotter than most people. Mrs Unten, however, is a definite cold frog who really appreciated that extra warmth provided by the Ultimate.

The Ultimate retails for \$129.95, the Heatrub Move for \$109.95 with both available in a range of sizes and colours and stocked by numerous retail outlets across the southern states of Australia. Find out more at www.zerofit.com.au ●



The Ultimate was a perfect fit for Ben's wife.

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- 48" x 10"
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- 52" x 12"
- 52" x 14"
- 56" x 14"
- 63" x 14"



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Sit tight

Scott Geelan put together a handload that had him questioning his eyesight

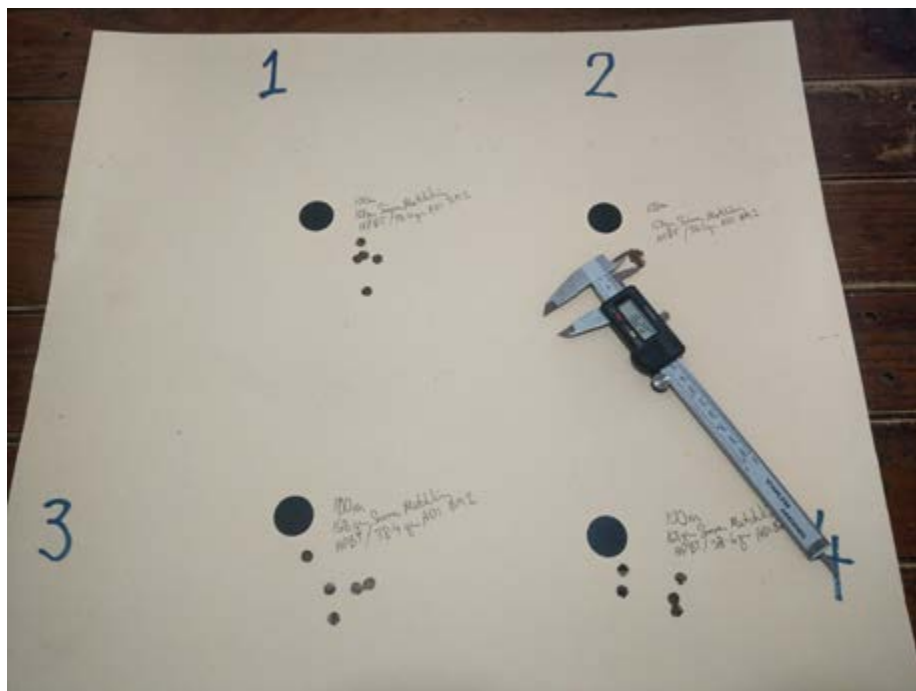
So I've had this Steyr Scout rifle in .308 for a while now, bought new around the end of 2006. I upgraded it with a Tactical Elite cheekrest and 10-round magazine just because I could and added a scope in the form of a Leupold VXII 6-18x40. I know the gun's over-scoped for what it is or at least that's what I thought initially . . . but read on.

Over the years it's had about 250 rounds of factory ammo - mostly Federal Gold Match with Sierra 168gn HPBT projectiles - put through it, all at the range and run-in carefully, fastidiously cleaned and rust-protected after each shoot and thoroughly cleaned before each shoot too. Not much work at all really as I'm primarily a pistol shooter so it'd be fair to say it's been a safe queen.

With all the restrictions we had to endure, closure of my pistol range and a whole bunch of other things I found myself with a fair bit of time on my hands. I'd planned a long time ago to tweak the Steyr with handloads and even having bought some top-shelf components, I never quite got around to it. Well 'the time has come, the Walrus said, to talk of other things' (with apologies to Lewis Carroll) and on hand I had the following components: Lapua .308 cases, Sierra MatchKing 168gn HPBT projectiles, ADI Benchmark 2 powder and some CCI large rifle primers.

I spent several days in the shed fiddling with the gun, Hornady Lock-n-Load head-space gauges, OAL gauge adapters fitted to a set of digital verniers and a Hornady .308 case gauge. For cartridge dimensions I measured the shoulder datum on 20 of the Lapua cases and as expected returned a seriously accurate and invariable result.

I then compared the average shoulder datum of the cases to the specially-machined test cartridge case supplied by Hornady where the difference was about 0.002" (apologies for the Imperial measurements but most loading data is Imperial). I factored that in, checked the overall length



(OAL) to engage with the rifling, backed off 0.005" and that was the preferred OAL. Note: Hornady et al recommend a 'jump' from projectile to rifling of 0.020"-0.040" to avoid excessive pressure spikes on ignition of the charge.

On consulting the ADI load data book for a 168gn projectile and Bench Mark 2 they recommended starting loads of 38gn up to 42gn (it's always worth double-checking this). Given the short jump I'd settled on I started with the minimum load (38) and made five rounds then five more each in 0.2gn increments up to 39gn. I also knocked out some plinking rounds with 168gn Hornady A-Max projectiles and 40gn Bench Mark 2 just for fun and with a 0.020" jump.

Range day

I planned to test at 100m off the bench with an adjustable fore-end rest and rabbit-ear bag under the butt. Conditions were fine and clear with light variable breezes





initially then stiffening a little as the day progressed. I started with five rounds of the random hunting load to foul the barrel and warm it up (see group 7 photo) then shot the first five at 38gn (group 1) and was perfectly happy with results at that point.

Then came the surprise. On to the next five at 38.2gn and on firing the first shot it landed where expected yet with the second I thought I'd missed the target completely. Now I was puzzled until I looked carefully again through the scope to discover the hole in the target didn't appear perfectly round. I swallowed hard, held my breath longer than usual and took the third shot and on further close inspection the hole had slightly changed shape again.

By this point I was incredulous as this is a Scout rifle with just a 20" barrel and in a big calibre, hardly the recipe for a tack-driver. So the fourth shot was fired and through the scope I couldn't determine where it had landed. After quietly telling myself "don't screw this one up" I took the fifth shot and again noticed a small and almost imperceptible change in the shape of the hole when viewed carefully through the scope.

Still in disbelief I walked down to the target and couldn't believe my eyes with five holes all closely overlapping (group 2) with maximum dimension to the outside of the projectiles measuring 16.2mm and as near as I can figure the maximum dimension of the group centre-to-centre of projectiles was a mere 8.4mm. If my

rough calculations are correct that works out at roughly .4 Minute of Angle at 100m. Subsequent tests of five rounds with 0.2gn increasing powder loads up to 39gn reverted to the same sort of groups as the initial 38gn batch.

To my amateur mind the fact that five projectiles could be placed in such a small and consistent group rules out a fluke so I reckon this might just be 'the load' for this firearm and I'm now working up more of

it and will return to the range to prove (or disprove) those results. Who'd have thought you could be this excited over a rifle group!

- The author takes no responsibility if you choose to use any of this information. We're all responsible for ensuring loads meet our own requirements and are safe to use. Do not use any jump to rifling less than 0.020" unless you know exactly what you're doing. ●



SSAA trio flies Aussie flag on world stage



Scott McMillan in action on Day 1, Stage 5. 'The Donut Shop' involved a 250m and 400m target, each engaged once from four tyre stacks in just 90 seconds.

The picturesque Moselle region of France was location for the inaugural Precision Rifle World Championships in August, hosted by the International Precision Rifle Federation at the Militaire Camp de Bitche. The week-long event welcomed 250 competitors from 16 countries with SSAA members Phil Nash, Scott McMillan and Tristan Wright flying the flag for Australia.

Shooters competed both individually and as teams across six divisions in the tournament which will go a long way to cementing Precision Rifle as an internationally recognised discipline. The concept of the Precision Rifle World Cup was born three years ago immediately prior to the COVID-19 pandemic which meant this first match was delayed by more than two years and indeed athletes were given only six weeks' notice to prepare for the event in France, the SSAA contingent travelling to compete in the Open Division.

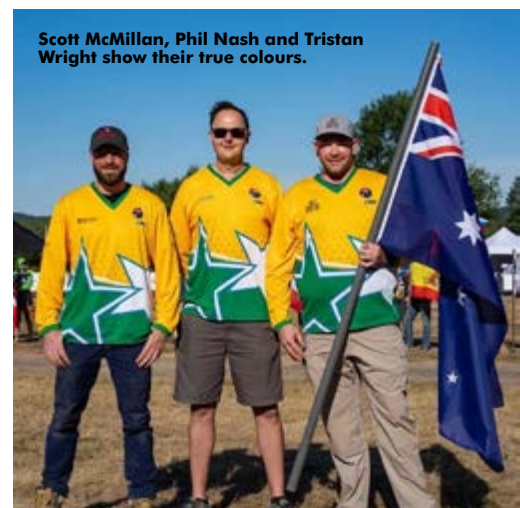
For those unfamiliar with the Precision Rifle discipline (more commonly known here as PRS or Practical Rifle), it's a dynamic and fast-paced sport which tests shooters' abilities both mentally and physically. Shooting positions are often compromised which push competitors to their limits with sometimes complex target sequences and challenging time-frames. Those targets are generally steel plates ranging from 1.0-3.0 MOA in size at distances from 200-600m (range dependant), stages generally 8-12 rounds and all over in one or two minutes, shooting positions anywhere from supported prone to improvised barricades (farm gates or purpose-built timber frames).

Hot, dry and dusty weather in north-east France meant match conditions were tough throughout with a stiff and swirling headwind making for some difficult calls on targets out to 900m. Long flights and precision equipment being at the mercy of

baggage handlers left two of the Aussies hampered by mechanical issues (even after post-flight inspections and a pre-match zero check), the problems eventually resolved late in the match which sadly proved too little, too late. Said Phil Nash: "Suffice to say we were just grateful to have taken SSAA Firearms Protection!"

As the match played out Nash finished a respectable 33rd in the Open category and 41st outright but in the process displaced some very talented shooters from around the world, McMillan placing 52nd in the Open division (75th overall) and Wright 93rd Open (181st). Perhaps unsurprisingly it was American shooters who proved dominant but not before being pushed all the way by athletes from South Africa and the UK who actually triumphed in a few of the lower divisions. At week's end though congratulations were reserved for Austin Buschman of the US as he was crowned inaugural Precision Rifle World Champion.

Precision Rifle is one of the fastest-growing SSAA disciplines with both centrefire and rimfire matches being staged by clubs across most states along with a national centrefire series. For those interested in trying it, a quick web search will reveal your nearest club and all that's needed is a rifle, a modest supply of ammunition and a can-do attitude but even then you can usually borrow a club rifle as the extremely inclusive and supportive community is always keen to welcome newcomers. ●



Scott McMillan, Phil Nash and Tristan Wright show their true colours.

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National

Muzzleloading Postal Shoot

August 1-December 17, 2022

All locations

Program: Categories and details on National website.
Contact: Kim Atkinson at muzzleloading@disciplines.
ssaa.org.au

SSAA Lever Action Silhouette Smallbore Postal Shoot

October 1 2022-January 31, 2023

All host clubs and branches

Program: 40-shot match, results due no later than COB on February 17, 2023 to National Awards Secretary Kathy Tobler, email toblerkathy@gmail.com

SSAA Gallery Rifle National Championships

March 18-19, 2023

SSAA Blue Hills, Copping, Tas. Program: March 17 - Practice; March 18 - 50m Precision, Multi-Target, Time & Precision 1, 1500 Match. March 19 - 1020 Match in Classic Class. Facilities: Camping, canteen, Saturday night barbecue (\$15). Contact: Don Robinson 0428 986 070 or David Moulton David.M@ssaabluehills.org.au

SSAA Muzzleloading National Championships

April 7-10, 2023

Wanneroo Shooting Complex, Pinjar, Perth WA
Program: April 6 Practice day; April 7-10 Competition.
Facilities: Limited catering only, limited camping and caravan sites, showers. Contact: Bob Boyd 0417 953 257 or robertboyd@bigpond.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.

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@ssaqlld.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 Martene 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@ssaqlld.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.

Tas

SSAA (Tas) Gallery Rifle State Championships

January 27-29, 2023

SSAA Blue Hills, Tas

Program: See National website. Contact: David.M@ssaabluehills.org.au

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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SSAA (Tas) Lever Action Silhouette State Championships

March 11-13, 2023

Westbury Shooting Club, Tas

Program: Saturday, March 11: Big Bore Lever Action Silhouette; March 12: Pistol Cartridge Lever Action Silhouette; March 13: Rimfire Lever Action Silhouette (all 80 shots). Facilities: Basic camping with toilets, tank water, no power. Entrance fee includes daily breakfast and lunch. Contact: Steve Collins 0459 834 885 or email admin@westburys shooting.club

ACT

Early Australia Day Rifle Metallic Silhouette State Championships

January 20-22, 2023

SSAA Majura Range, ACT

Program – Friday: Dawn to 8.30am practice, 9am 80 shots air rifle. Saturday: Dawn to 8.30am practice, 9am 80 shots rimfire. Sunday: Dawn to 8.30am practice, 9am 80 shots centerfire. Facilities: Camping on range with water, power and showers, \$10 per person per night, juniors free. Canteen available for weekend. Contact: David 0423 043 663 email dtrue222@gmail.com, Mark 0401 867 839 email mn11@live.com.au.

ACT Black Powder Cartridge Rifle Silhouette State Championship

January 23, 2023

SSAA Majura Range, ACT

Program: Dawn to 8am practice and weigh-in, 8.30am Black Powder Cartridge Rifle Match. 1pm practice and weigh-in, 2pm 40 shots Black Powder Cartridge Rifle. Facilities: Camping on range with water, power and showers, \$10 per person per night, juniors free. Contact: David 0423 043 663 email dtrue222@gmail.com, Mark 0401 867 839 email mn11@live.com.au.

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.

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And so it comes full circle

Almost 30 years ago I stopped going to the local rifle range and though I was still shooting and competing reasonably well at that time, niggling back problems were making it difficult and I really wasn't enjoying it any more. On top of that was a small group of green-eyed local heroes who'd trouble getting their tiny minds around what I did for a living. The pest control part of my job was what they thought they'd like to do but couldn't because they weren't in the job. My writing was also making headway at the time and that gave them two obvious points of difference to chew on. Their petty crap was usually a group effort when I turned up at the range and in the end it effectively burned the last of my support for the branch and I walked away.

Still needing somewhere to shoot, my hunting mate and I approached a local property owner and asked about setting up a benchrest and some target frames in one of the back gullies. He gave us permission and from that time on I never had need of a formal range again. I've no idea how many review and other firearms were sighted-in and tested there but everything from air rifles to heavy calibre big game rifles and shotguns were put through their paces. We hunted rabbits, foxes, cats, kangaroos, goats and the occasional fallow deer and could use the range whenever we liked, all we had to do was make sure there was no stock in the gully so it was a very convenient arrangement.

The property was sold recently and we assumed the access we'd previously enjoyed stopped with the sale though to date I haven't been able to catch up with the new owner to find out if that's the case. It created problems in terms of being able to check sight settings and loads for the

winter hunting season, so looking for a resolution I talked to a friend who was still going to the range and a few days later one wintry Sunday afternoon I found myself back where I'd been all those years ago.

It had been a long time since I'd sat on a formal range for a sighting session where I had to consider other shooters but everyone was courteous and happy to co-operate with each other. The essential formal safety requirements and warnings were strict but low-key, more than I remembered from the past but not enough to be intrusive so I came away knowing I'd enjoyed the afternoon more than I thought I would.

Most of that can be attributed to the other shooters who were there as none of us had anything to prove and the camaraderie was genuine. We were all doing what we came to do without stress or strain or needless aggravation. The conversations were friendly and informative as they always are when shooters and hunters chew the fat about their favourite subjects. We asked questions, gave answers, compared notes and expressed opinions on all manner of things in a respectful way devoid of malice.

None of the unpleasantness of the old days was there and I found myself thinking that perhaps I could become involved with the branch again. At this point I know I don't want to go back to competitive shooting but that doesn't mean I can't make the effort to become a little more sociable. Who knows, the occasional afternoon back on the range may even do me some good.

• 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 footsteps5350@gmail.com



... and here it ends

It has long been accepted that all good things must come to an end and this month it's Jumbunna's turn. For more than 34 years it has been my great privilege and pleasure to sit down and write this page each month, putting my thoughts, ramblings, observations and little adventures out there for readers to share. Though I've occasionally ruffled a few feathers the vast majority of feedback I've received over the years has been overwhelmingly positive and for that I'm truly grateful. Many, many people have told me this page is the first one they read each month and I've always taken that as a nod of approval as it's nice to know you're appreciated.

But now it's time for me to move on to other things. My focus and direction has changed as hunting, shooting, collecting and travelling aren't as important as they once were and writing about them no longer drives me as hard as it used to. Sadly Jumbunna is a casualty of that process and while I can't stop writing altogether, from here on in it'll only be on an occasional basis. So thanks for reading me for as long as you have, it's been an interesting and immensely satisfying journey and I hope you all enjoyed it as much as I did. Stay safe and keep your powder dry.

• While everyone on the editorial team is sorry to see John call time on Jumbunna, we respect his decision and salute those 34 years of unwavering commitment. We wish John well for the future and he goes in the knowledge that his words of wisdom will always be welcome on the pages of *Australian Shooter*.
- Editor

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