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AUSTRALIAN

July 2022
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Shooter

THE MAGAZINE FOR SPORTING SHOOTERS

REVIEWS

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Swamp FEVER

Fond memories of hunting the Great Cumbung



Making sense of choke - handy hints for shotgunners

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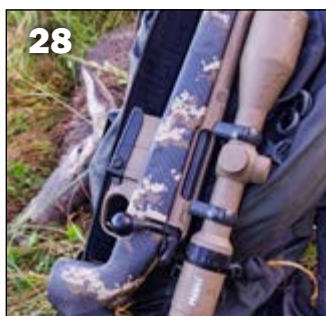
Our July cover - see page 20

NEXT ISSUE

We've laid our hands on the latest Mauser M18 Stainless rifle, a full-size bolt-action repeater which is now available in the .223 Remington calibre. As reviewer Con Kapralos assessed: "This is a rifle to take what Australian hunting climates can dish out and keep on delivering with great accuracy and reliability. It's just the ticket for small game enthusiasts or farmers after a reliable pest control firearm."

If a cartridge is to perform well it must be physically compatible with the rifle it's fired in and only by testing numerous brands of ammunition can we hope to sort out the good from the bad. Next month, seasoned reloader John Hill looks at what it takes to find the right cartridge for your rifle and why cartridge selection is so important when it comes to accurate results.

August marks the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Milne Bay in Papua New Guinea during which the Australians faced the might of the Imperial Japanese forces. Regular contributor Chris Redlich has penned a fascinating insight into the conflict as experienced by his grandfather who was a section gunner and one of the Milne Bay survivors in what is widely regarded as the first major battle of the war in the Pacific.





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First face-to-face National AGM in three years

The Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (SSAA National) held its 60th Annual General Meeting in Melbourne in May, the first SSAA National AGM in a face-to-face setting since 2019. Delegates from all state and territory branches were happy to be able to attend in person and reflect on the Association's successes and challenges of the past 12 months as the pandemic continues to impact many facets of our lives.

Lance Miller was re-elected unopposed to the position of SSAA National President as was Senior Vice-President Denis Moroney, Treasurer Alf Bastian and Secretary Kaye McIntyre. David Handyside was elected Junior Vice-President and Jennifer Martens accepted the position of Public Officer.

Mr Miller addressed the meeting and talked of how the Association has continued to prosper despite the one-in-100-year pandemic. Association CEO Tim Bannister also addressed the meeting and particularly



Clive Pugh, SSAA President Lance Miller and Senator Bridget McKenzie.

thanked SSAA National staff for rising to the challenge in difficult times.

Delegates welcomed Winchester Australia Managing Director Clive Pugh and Victorian Nationals Senator Bridget McKenzie to address the meeting and dinner respectively. Mr Pugh gave an insight into how the firearm wholesaler has adapted to supply chains, transport and fluctuating service prices which impacted countless industries around the world during the pandemic. Senator McKenzie has been a strong supporter of recreational shooters and hunters in Australia for many years and always brings with her great conversation and insight.

'Best in world' title for Field to Fork - Second Helpings

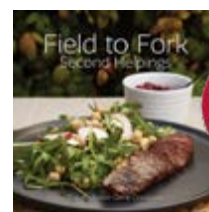
SSAA National's *Field to Fork - Second Helpings* cookbook has received one of the highest honours in food culture by being named one of the top two meat cookbooks in the world. This latest accolade for the *Field to Fork* franchise was announced at the 27th Gourmand World Cookbook Awards in Umea, Sweden last month.

It marks the third time a *Field to Fork* publication has been recognised on the international stage. *Field to Fork - Second Helpings* was named Australia's Best Meat Cookbook in the 2021 Gourmand World Cookbook Awards and the first instalment in the series, *Field to Fork - The Australian Game Cookbook*, was named Best First Cookbook (Australia) in 2012.

The *Field to Fork* cooking initiative is a celebration of Australia's unique flora and fauna and the important connection people feel to their food and its origins. It has featured a wide range of game meats including camel, snapper, crocodile and venison to illus-

trate a grassroots approach to sustainably sourcing and cooking food. SSAA National is proud to have created a cookbook which is celebrated on an international scale and highlights Australia's fishers, recreational hunters and producers for their ethical harvesting of clean, green and nutritious food.

The Gourmand World Cookbook Awards was founded by Edouard Cointreau in 1995 and the annual awards are the world's largest international competition in the food sector. Entries from 227 countries were received for this year's awards in one of the largest and most competitive fields of nominees in the history of the initiative. To secure your copy of the two-time award-winning *Field to Fork - Second Helpings* cookbook, visit onlineshop.ssaa.org.au



The not-so-fickle fox

I WAS OUT hunting when I saw what I thought were two foxes in the throes of a courtship dance - on their hind legs, fore-arms embraced, jumping and snapping at each other. I could clearly see one fox but the other was backed into a sparse patch of bush. I quickly despatched the one I could see and smartly worked the bolt on my rifle with the hope of a shot at the other, which to my eyes was still in the spindly bush.



You can imagine my surprise when, upon moving forward, it wasn't a fox but a young kangaroo about 80cm tall with blood on its face, skin ripped and in a state of shock. The fox I despatched had cornered the young roo and was jumping and biting at the face and throat of its quarry. Thankfully I came along and spoiled his plans for a tasty meal.

Meanwhile, the roo had made its escape but the encounter made me realise it's not just birds and other small creatures which fall victim to the fox, but larger animals as well - possibly wallabies, koalas and small wombats. Foxes are doing far more damage than I'd previously thought.

Ian Cameron, via email

Scout Rifle solution

I THOROUGHLY ENJOYED Brad Allen's article on the Scout Rifle (*Shooter*, November 2021). I also have what he calls a Ruger M77 Mk.2 Paddle Stock in .223 calibre which I love and regularly use for hunting but am frustrated by the lack of detachable magazine options. Brad says his son Bill was able to buy a new triggerguard and magazine floorplate assembly to suit this rifle yet my search only found a kit from America which would cost an arm and a leg with no guarantee it would ever get here. Any help appreciated.

Darryl Jell, via email

• My gunsmith mate advises bottom metal replacements with removable mag system to fit the Ruger M77 .223 are like hens' teeth. He reckons the 'Wyatt' brand replacements are on back order with no ETA and could take two years to get here. My best shot would be if 10-round mag capacity is required, buy a Ruger American Ranch (AR mag) rifle in .223 - **Brad Allen**



Young gun: SSAA member Tom Bush contacted us to say his three-year-old son is learning to read - and we can't think of a better place to start!

Insurance Q&A

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Q I have a home and contents policy and am trying to work out if I need to list some valuable jewellery I've recently inherited to my cover. For this sort of item should I be listing them on my insurance specifically or are they automatically covered under my contents?

Roberta Wilson, via email

A Home and contents insurance is usually able to cover your items, however whether they need to be listed depends on your individual policy. As you accumulate and upgrade your contents over time, the cost of replacing new contents may increase. That's why it's important to regularly review your contents sum insured and discuss with your broker to make sure your policy will respond appropriately if the need to make a claim arises. In the case of valuable items it's worthwhile talking to your

broker or insurance company to work out what's the best way to make sure your possessions are covered.

At SSAA Insurance Brokers we can take care of your home and contents insurance and our brokers are always on hand to answer questions and provide a free quote to suit your situation. To discuss this further call us on 08 8332 0281. Further information on member benefits and other insurance products is online at www.ssaaiib.com.au



Use technology to increase pest control success

Thermal optics give those undertaking pest control an effective tool to boost their efficiency and success and although the price of thermal has come down significantly, it's still a substantial investment. I certainly see it as an investment because if you set yourself up and use it properly it's a game changer that'll alter the way you operate and the outcome of your efforts in a positive way. So if you make the decision to dip your toes in the water and equip yourself with thermal optics where should you start and what should you buy first?

Now this is a very important question and one that could determine how well your thermal journey goes and potentially ends. In an upcoming edition of *Australian Shooter* I'll provide a more in-depth review of this subject but for now let's look what I believe are key considerations - and the biggest decision you'll have to make is how much you're willing to spend.

If your budget isn't the biggest you may need to consider a hop, skip and jump approach but if you're lucky enough to have a budget with no financial constraints, then all you need to do is research the best there is and buy everything you think you need.

The only advice I'd offer those lucky ones would be to buy a dedicated thermal monocular for spotting and dedicated thermal scope for your rifle. Many models of scopes allow several profiles to be set up so you can interchange them with different firearms - it's a lot easier to scan paddocks or the bush with a handheld or vehicle-mounted thermal monocular than shouldering and waving around



your rifle as this would be physically taxing and certainly not the safest thing to do.

Even on fairly tight budget you should always look to buy the best-featured product you can afford - even if you need to save up for a while - so don't be afraid to buy your thermal gear in stages to achieve this. There are ways to improve your pest control effectiveness without going full speed ahead and buying a full kit of cheap and nasty thermal gear you might regret.

To start your thermal journey, buying a quality monocular is the best place to begin as this will enable you to see more targets and hopefully allow you to do this without alerting them to your presence. This is key to boosting your effectiveness straight away because instead of only seeing a few of the pest animals you seek you'll potentially see more - and before they know you're there. Increased detection allows increased targeting so it certainly provides you with a vital tool to increase your tallies.

Using a thermal monocular in combination with a traditional spotlight or having a high-powered hunting torch attached to your scope will increase effectiveness. But

remember that with a traditional spotlight, target species will detect you and wary ones won't stick around so until you can move to total blackout operations, including the use of a thermal or night-vision scope, you should consider using red filters on your lights.

These filters are low-cost options that'll improve your performance as most pest animals aren't startled by red light in the same way they are with white. If you've used a thermal monocular for spotting you should only be switching on the light at target acquisition when ready to shoot as the use of red light reduces the chances of other potential targets being scared off. The use of thermal optics is restricted in some circumstances - such as hunting deer and in Victoria under their game hunting regulations - but generally speaking, if targeting pest animals on private property then thermal can legitimately be used.



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The beginning of something big

Winchester, arguably the best-known firearm brand of all time, was founded by Oliver Winchester, a clothing manufacturer based in New York City and New Haven, Connecticut who was born to Samuel Winchester and Hannah Bates in Boston on November 30, 1810. Always on the lookout for opportunities he discovered one of the divisions of Smith & Wesson firearms was in financial difficulty, so in 1855 he gathered some other stockholders and bought the division, then known as the Volcanic Repeating Arms Company and by 1857 had become the major shareholder and moved the business to New Haven and changed its name to New Haven Arms Company.

Although the Volcanic rifles repeater design was far superior to its opposition,

there was a problem with the Volcanic cartridge used in the rifle. These were produced in .25 and .32 calibres for use in both pistols and rifles but were no match ballistically for its competitor's larger-calibre cartridges.

But Winchester had on his staff Benjamin Tyler Henry, a highly competent engineer who was given the task of improving the Volcanic repeating rifle which he did by enlarging the frame and magazine to take 17 of his new all-brass .44 calibre rimfire cartridges. So successful was this new cartridge that Henry was rewarded by it being granted a patent on October 16, 1860 for what became the famous Henry rifle.

During the following six years of production around 12,000 of these Henry rifles were manufactured in both iron and brass-framed models. Winchester then changed his company name to the Winchester Repeating Arms Company and with the help of employee Nelson King, upgraded the rifle by adding a loading gate on the right of the receiver, improving the magazine and adding a wooden fore-end for what was to become the first Winchester rifle - the Model 1866. These first firearms were made in Bridgeport before the Winchester Repeating Arms Company moved to New Haven in 1871 where manufacturing of the Model 1866 continued.

In 1873 under the direction of Thomas Gray Bennett an updated rifle - the Winchester 1873 - was introduced along the


same lines as the Model 1866 but with a far stronger mechanism with parts which could handle the heavier centrefire cartridges now in use. It also had a sliding cover on the action to keep dirt and water out the mechanism and the wooded fore-stock on the musket was lengthened. Three models were available in the Sporting rifle, Carbine and Musket with a selection of different barrel lengths also an option.

In response to their competitors who had rifle models using larger and heavier cartridges, in 1876 Winchester introduced their Model 1876 repeating rifle chambered for the .45-75 Winchester cartridge. Loaded with 75 grains of black powder and a 350-grain lead bullet, its muzzle energy was 1400 ft-lb which was double that of the .44-40 Winchester cartridge used in the Model 1873. In 1879 they added the .45-60 W.C.F. and .50-95 W.C.F. cartridges and five years later the .40-60 W.C.F. to the chamberings available.

The Model 1876 Winchester rifle proved extremely popular with hunters who needed a heavy calibre repeating rifle and when production ceased in 1897, 63,871 had been sold around the world in countries including India, Africa, England and Canada and was the rifle of choice in his early days of Theodore Roosevelt who would go on to become the 26th President of the United States.

Pioneer: Oliver Winchester.





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SIFA



Q I was interested to read that another shooting organisation recently reversed its decision to allow 32 gram shotshells in some of its events. I'd have thought in this day and age that was a backward move as I believe 28 gram shotshells would be just as effective at any range. Keen to hear your thoughts on this.
Michael Moretti, Vic.

A I assume the decision you refer to is the Australian Clay Target Association's move to continue to allow its members to shoot 32 gram (1 $\frac{1}{8}$ ounce) shotshells in its Handicap events. I've discussed this in the past and while this event is irrelevant to members of the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia, the answer may be quite beneficial. Specifically where they're allowing the use of 32 gram shotshells to continue is in their Handicap event where targets are being broken at distances of up to around 40 to 45m by competitors shooting at their maximum handicap distance of 25m from the trap house.

If I was on a Sporting Clays range or standing at the edge of a duck swamp knowing my target was at 45m, what shotshell do I feel would give me the greatest chance of breaking the clay or falling the waterfowl from the sky if I was offered a 28 gram or 32 gram shotshell? You'd have to be the world's greatest salesman to convince me that using 4 grams less of the same size shot will increase my chances of scoring a hit or eating duck for dinner that night. More lead, more dead!

Now I've used that phrase in this column before and will continue to use it as there's simply no valid argument that less shot is more effective. Could I score a hit or a kill



with 28 grams of shot? Of course. Would it recoil less? Provided I'm not trying to drive the 28 gram shotshell out the end of my barrel at ridiculous speeds then once again the lighter payload will naturally recoil less. But your question asks 'just as effective at any range'.

To take this analogy further the International Shooting Sports Federation (ISSF) introduced a reduction in shotshell payloads for its Olympic Clay Target events in 1973 from 36 grams to 32 grams. In 1989 they further reduced this from 32 to 28 grams and again in 1993 it went from 28 to 24 grams and there's now further discussion about 21 gram loads being introduced in the future. Personally I doubt this will happen but did all the reductions in payloads reduce scores in their events? You bet they did. There are still great scores at the top end of the field but the average score was reduced on each occasion and that's exactly what the ISSF was looking to achieve.

To be honest I couldn't imagine the pain of having to shoot 36 gram shotshells for two or three days of competition using a four kilogram shotgun. This amount of shot

could very well be too much as the problems of excessive recoil may outweigh the benefits of a denser shot pattern at 45m. So 32 grams is probably more than enough but once again, if you were offered one shotshell to choose between a 36 gram and 32 gram to break one target or shoot one duck which may save you from going hungry, what would your choice be - a 36 gram shell for sure (I'll take pain over hunger every time).

There's always been the argument thrown around that less lead shot is better for the environment and I guess that's valid to a point. If everyone uses 4 grams less of lead per shot over a long period of time then it will of course add up, but I doubt our friends from The Greens would even debate this point, as after reading some of their latest firearms policies I don't think you could reason with them on any level. I hope this helps but remember to know the rules of your competition before being tempted to use a 'bigger' shotshell.



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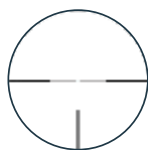
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Got a question - ask our **TOP SHOTS?**

• John Dunn • Paul Miller • Greg Riemer • Geoff Smith • Barry Wilmot • Rod Pascoe

email: edit@ssaa.org.au

Q Can anyone shed any light on this pistol left in a shearers' room in WA?
Pauline King, via email

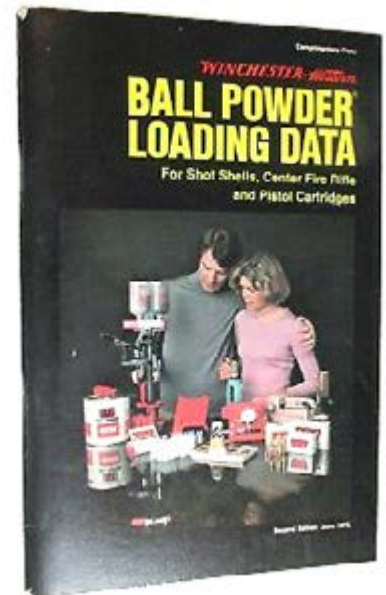
A Your photos depict a Webley solid-frame revolver commonly known as a British Bulldog or simply Bulldog. Despite its name and according to the 'Crown over R' proof mark, this example was made in Belgium as were many firearms regardless of their country of original design. Many retailers would buy firearms 'in the white' and finish them off with their own grips and other markings to disguise their origin and, in the US for example, some were marketed as Western Bulldog.

Despite their bulky appearance these revolvers were popular pocket pistols kept mainly as self-protection firearms around the end of the 19th century and even into the early 1900s. They came in a number of versions - 1, 1½, 2 and even Pug - and were chambered for a variety of cartridges from .320 CF (centrefire) to .450 CF as well as rimfire rounds from .32 RF to .44 RF. In Australia the discovery of gold brought many miners, among others, and their firearms to our shores and the example you show could possibly have a similar history.
Rod Pascoe

Q I was given a can of Winchester 630 propellant some time ago by a friend who gave up shooting through poor health. Now that handgun propellant is in short supply I'd like to use this in my 9mm handgun as the powder is still in reasonable condition, flows smoothly and doesn't smell like vinegar. However, I don't have any loads for it as it's apparently now obsolete so can you please suggest any safe loads?
Colin M, via email

A Thanks for your question Colin. Provided the can has been stored appropriately your propellant should still be safe to use. I've used Winchester 630 propellant myself in several handguns including 9mm Luger and .357 Magnum and found it to work satisfactorily but you *MUST* use Magnum primers to avoid unburnt powder residues.

The 1975 Winchester Western *Ball Powder Loading Data* handbook includes 630 but only gives loads for the 9mm handgun in projectile weights of 100 grains (10.9 grains of 630 for velocity of 1210fps and pressure of 28,000psi) and 115 grains (10.3 grains for velocity of 1125fps and pressure of 31,000psi).



In his 1993 *Practical Reloading Manual*, Nick Harvey recommends for the 125 grain bullet, use loads of 8 grains for velocity of 1000fps and up to a maximum of 9.3 grains for velocity of 1130fps. The Western Powders Burn Rate Chart places W630 as marginally slower burning than ADI's AP100. According to Wikipedia the Olin Corporation introduced Winchester 630 double-based ball propellant in 1973 to replace the older 630P.
Geoff Smith



Q I'm about to inherit a Miroku ML-22 Lever Action .22 rifle complete with a Nikko Stirling Silver Crown 4x20 telescopic sight. The left of the barrel is stamped: Miroku Firearms Mfg. Co. Kochi Japan and the right: ML-22 caliber .22 Short, Long & Long Rifle - US Patent No. 3377731. It's coming from an in-law and was first registered in July 1975. The rifle has purportedly had fewer than 100 rounds put through it and the whole package appears in excellent condition (the lever action operates smoothly). My question is: Can the .22 WMR cartridge be used functionally and safely in this rifle?

Bruce Forbes, SA

A The short answer to your question Bruce is no, it can't. The action was designed to handle the rimfire cartridges listed on the barrel individually or mixed but will not accept .22 WMR ammo which is physically much larger, therefore requires a longer and larger diameter chamber. Almost perversely, the bore diameter for the .22 WMR is smaller (.224") than the .22LR at .225".

ML-22 rifles have always enjoyed a good reputation for reliability and accuracy and for many years now Browning-branded firearms have been manufactured under licence by Miroku, so don't be put off by the 'Made in Japan' stamping. Your little rifle is a good one and should be enjoyed for what it is.

The Nikko Stirling Silver Crown 4x20 scope is contemporaneous with the vintage of the rifle and while there are a host of better scopes available these days, it's a nice fit on a rimfire rifle like the Miroku, albeit a little old-fashioned.

John Dunn

Q We hear a lot these days about gunfit for shotguns but is it important for rifle shooting as well?

Jack, NSW

A You're right Jack, we do tend to hear more about fitting shotguns more so than rifles to suit an individual. Gunfit is a big subject and particularly relevant to shotgunning because you 'point' a shotgun rather than aim it (shotgun shooting mainly involves moving targets whether they be clay or game). Any shot at a stationary target requires 'aiming' with a shotgun and that too relies on the gun placing its pattern where you're looking down the rib. A comfortably fitting shotgun which comes to the shoulder easily and places its pattern where you want it is a huge advantage to successful shooting, and also means the gun is less likely to whack you in the cheek or tire you out after a long day's shooting.

With rifles you're mostly shooting at stationary targets and often have time to make yourself comfortable by fitting yourself to the stock and taking aim with

precision. There's only one projectile in a rifle cartridge and you want it to go exactly where you're aiming. Nowadays we're seeing more rifles coming to the market with adjustable stocks and there are also several adjustable aftermarket stocks available for many brands. This has probably come about as a development of tactical or target rifles in the market and flowed through to hunting firearms.

With these type of rifle stocks you can adjust them to be more comfortable in terms of length along with height and alignment of the comb. This can lead to better cheek weld to the top of the comb which in turn leads to more consistent alignment of the eye when looking through a scope or open sights. For shooting at running game they actually feel more like a shotgun. Traditionalists prefer a classic stock but this relies on it fitting the average shooter as it comes from the factory, the alternative being to have a custom stock made to his or her preferred dimensions.

Paul Miller





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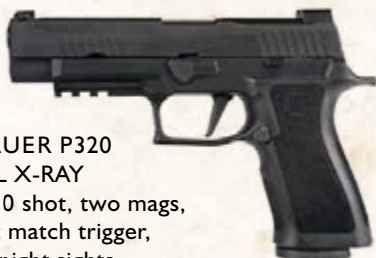
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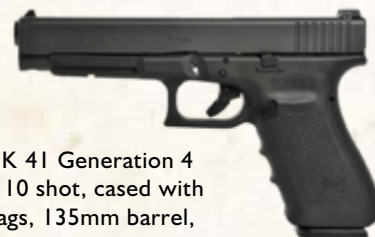
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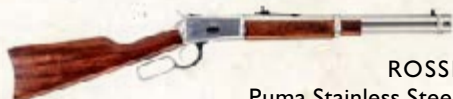
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Glass act

Thrive binos by ZeroTech
put Ben Unten in the picture



Measuring a compact 150mm long by 103mm wide in the collapsed position, the Thrive binoculars in 10x42 from ZeroTech crossed my desk recently. ZeroTech claim 54 years of experience in the optical market supplying to retailers across Australia and the Asia Pacific.

Weighing 625 grams on my digital scales the Thrive 'Richies' (Richie Benauds = binos) are packaged with an instruction manual, cleaning cloth, soft case with neck strap along with a 50mm-wide padded neck strap which attaches directly to the binos themselves.

Thrive binoculars come with an impressive 'triple-A lifetime warranty' which includes the statement: "Regardless of the fault or the reason," the warranty going on to explain that it automatically goes with the sale of the product so any new buyer inherits the warranty even when buying second-hand.

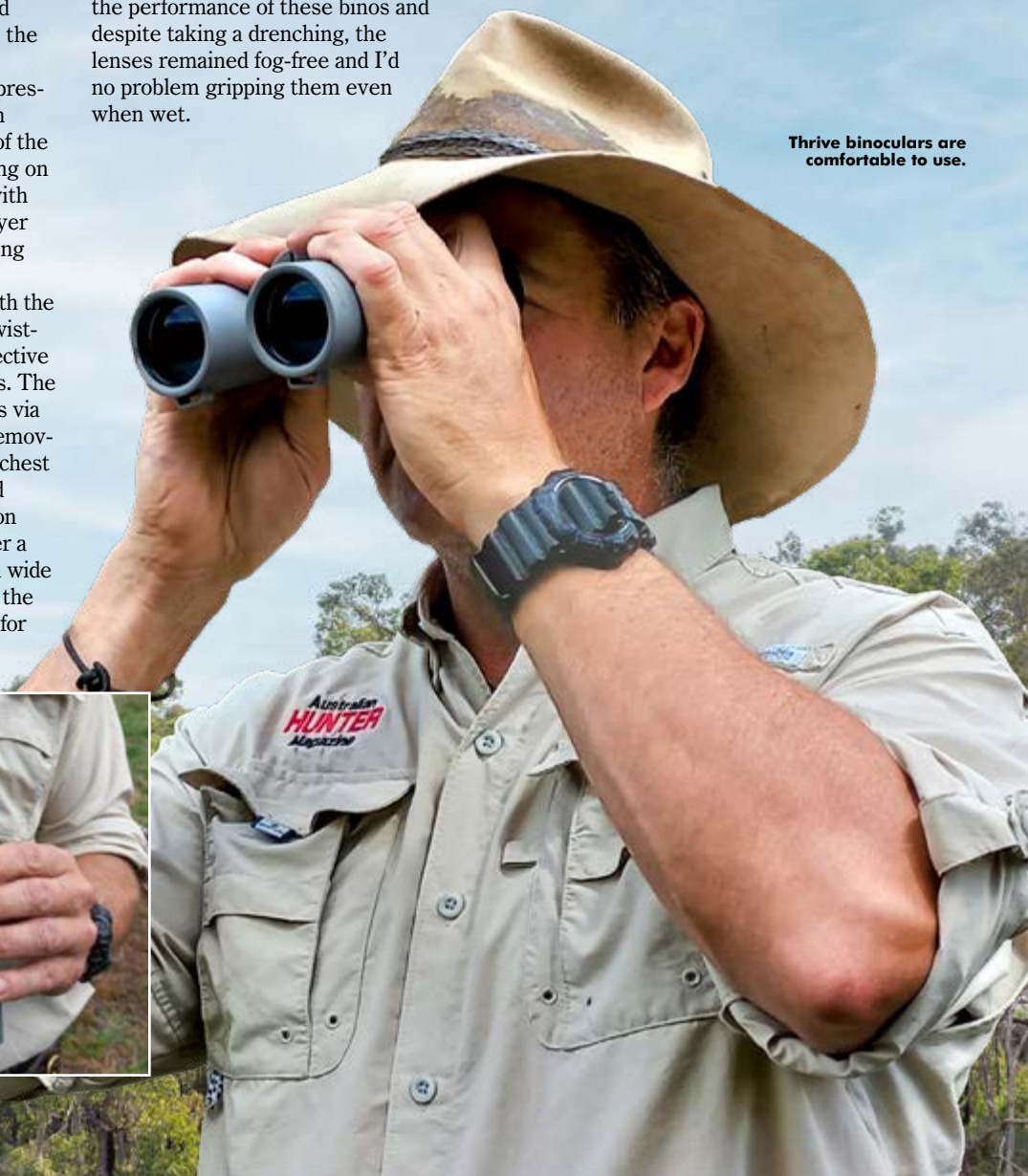
Using a roof prism design to help with the compact design, the Thrives feature twist-up eyecups as well as rubberised protective caps for the ocular and objective lenses. The lens caps are attached to the binoculars via a rubber lanyard which I like and are removable if required for transitioning into a chest harness. The exterior has a rubberised coating for increased grip and protection while the fully multi-coated lenses offer a crisp, clear field of view listed as 108m wide at 1000m, focusing achieved by rolling the oversized focus wheel which is ribbed for additional grip.

In the field

An impromptu pre-rut trip near the southern part of NSW served as the perfect test outing. The ground was saturated from an overnight heavy downpour and light rain continued to fall as we set out on our pre-dusk hunt, the clarity and light-gathering capabilities of the Thrive enabling me to spot a mature fallow buck in the gloom of the failing light before night-fall. Unfortunately no shooting opportunity presented but I was impressed with the performance of these binos and despite taking a drenching, the lenses remained fog-free and I'd no problem gripping them even when wet.

Although slightly longer than my current hunting glass, the reduction in weight means they're comfortable to use in the field so if you're after reasonably priced hunting binos, Thrive by ZeroTech are definitely worth considering (they're also available in 8x32, 10x32, 8x42 as well as the 10x42s tested). Thrive 10x42s retail for \$299 and are available from good gunshops. Find out more by visiting zerotechoutdoors.com.au or emailing sales@zerotech.com.au ●

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Swamp fever

Hunting the Great Cumbung is something Sam Garro will never forget

In the 1970s when I launched my quest to hunt feral pigs and goats in outback New South Wales, trying to find properties was nigh impossible but through persistence and lack of options I eventually gained access to a couple of large sheep and cattle estates on a fee basis of \$10 daily per person, a venture some farmers were trialling at the time to supplement their income. It was a matter of patience and maintaining written correspondence with the owners over a three-year period, initially as a prolonged drought and then flood prevented us from entering the properties.

While not the preferred method - I always wanted to be accepted on my own merits, goodwill and honesty - it nevertheless provided the opportunity to hunt feral game like pigs and goats in some great country and gave me my first memorable experiences. Today, self-guided or guided hunts have become the norm with the cost varying depending on the type of game pursued, how many hunters are involved, facilities on offer and duration of the hunt.


A few years later I was grateful to be invited by my uncle to hunt two properties in the Great Cumbung or Cumbungi Swamp region of south-western NSW only he and a select few were allowed access to, coincidentally a time when there was a duck season before it was banned in 1995 by the-then NSW Government. For almost 30 years I was privileged to hunt in an environment I first likened to a smaller version of Kakadu with its extensive and far-reaching waterways, expansive reed beds, swamps and incredible diversity of wildlife including game such as rabbits, foxes, feral pigs and later goats, when drought and severe bushfires to the north around Ivanhoe drove them south.

The swamp

The Great Cumbung Swamp is a vast wetland ecosystem covering roughly 16,000 hectares through which the Murrumbidgee and Lachlan Rivers flow, its waters especially in times of heavy flood inundating the land for miles around, resembling a huge inland sea. It's one of the largest and most important wetlands in the Murray-Darling Basin and home to migratory birds, all manner of wildlife and numerous plant species.

Early days

My uncle's recollections of his hunting experiences dating back to the 1960s, especially the duck shooting season for which he held a great passion, were always enthralling and captivating and in particular he cherished close friendships formed over many years with property owners, managers and jackaroos. One duck season during a flood they shot ducks at the old racecourse, the only dry area away from a handful of houses in Oxley, NSW on the Lachlan River at the time, now a virtual ghost town save for a couple of occupied bungalows. In its heyday when surrounding properties carried a few thousand sheep and cattle, the area was alive



Sam tries to come to terms with worsening drought conditions.



The magnificent redgum forest is home to a diversity of wildlife - birds, mammals, reptiles and insects.

with activity as owners, jackaroos, drovers, shearers, trucks drivers and others all played their part.

He recounted some of nature's marvellous spectacles rarely experienced today, how on occasions the duck numbers circling overhead were so great they blocked out the sun and he was spoilt for choice on which species to shoot. There were black ducks, chestnut teal, blue-wing shovellers, pink-eared, hardhead, mountain ducks and plumed whistling ducks as well as the protected freckled and musk ducks. One day while taking a break from shooting, a water rat casually surfaced to sit beside him on a fallen log and preen its coat and he recalled how it wasn't unusual to see 50 pigs or more casually moving through forest in line formation or along the water's edge. He also had the honour and pleasure to accompany Sir Henry Bolte, the former Victorian Premier, on duck hunts with Charles Point a few kilometres from camp at the juncture of the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee Rivers the Premier's favoured shooting spot.

Some of the issues property owners faced back then were scrub bulls breaking fences and luring cattle away and wild dogs ruthlessly predating on sheep and cattle. The dogs interestingly enough were eventually eradicated by the prolific feral pigs which flourished in the conditions, something hired professional shooters couldn't achieve at the time. Feral pigs, an additional problem in themselves, were and continue to be controlled with the assistance of the NSW Local Land Services through aerial culling.

Duck openings

When I first hunted those properties in the late 1970s the duck shooting season was the main draw although I welcomed the prospect of stalking feral pigs in the reeds. Duck openings were spectacular and success varied from season to season, the first couple of days spent checking the area for duck numbers, preparing hides and setting up decoys. At 4.30 on opening morning some shooters would boat their way up the ever-snaking Lachlan River to position themselves while others left camp in the dark with torches to wade to their hides in the reeds.

When that pink flare burst the awakening sky the shooting started and we were soon accompanied by discharging shotguns from all adjoining properties like small bursts of rolling thunder. The first couple of hours were always the most productive before birds moved to isolated pockets devoid of shooters and in late evenings when they returned. Those two or three days spent



Sam with a goat for meat.



Sam shows off a feral pig.

Swamp fever

isolated in the bush doing what we loved best always seemed to pass too quickly. One year I was fortunate to witness a spectacular duck gathering for the first time where around 5000 birds congregated on a small lake before flying north early next morning to new water.

Personal experiences

Camp was usually set up next to the Lachlan or Murrumbidgee River where we had shade under the canopy of tall gums, water and the river to swim, early mornings and afternoons devoted to hunting game with a spot of fishing during the day and nightly spotlighting for rabbits and foxes. Each trip seemed to present something new or different and some of the more notable examples include stalking an open section of grassland for pigs one afternoon as two territorial goannas were engaged in a brutal power struggle without regard for my proximity.

On another occasion much to my dismay a majestic wedge-tailed eagle swooped down to pluck from the water a duck I'd just shot, then there was a kangaroo bounding into the middle of a small pond to protect itself against an over-excited hunter's dog which luckily was retrieved just in time.

Pigs were spotted tossing large carp out of a drying lake and hiding them under bushes to feast on later, resulting in a tug of war between a fox and a pig over a dead fish. Then came a rabbit plague where the ground one late evening outside the homestead literally moved with their overwhelming numbers criss-crossing the hill-sides for miles.

Millennium drought

In 1979 the property owner grazed 5000 head of cattle on one station but by 2007 that had been reduced to barely 300 head and soon after none due to the worsening drought which had its beginnings in the late



Positioning duck decoys before the opening.

1990s with 2006 being the driest year on record. The drought combined with water extracted upstream for expanding crop farming resulted in every channel, dam, billabong, anabranch, swamp, creek and lake on the properties completely drying up.

Cumbungi Swamp where cattle once browsed were now dry pans of cracked black soil, a spectacle and reality difficult to comprehend in such flood-prone country which had always held abundant water. The Murrumbidgee River was so depleted you could wade across the waist-high water and while the drought eventually broke, it would take precious time for the delicate ecosystem to recover.

Nothing lasts for ever

The cattle stations - Boyong and Juanbung - which we'd frequented were sold around 2007 to a family pastoralist establishment seeking to expand their cattle enterprise and while we had a long-term close relationship with the previous owner and our bona-fide status passed on, the new owners didn't want hunters, fishers or campers on the properties. As disappointing as it was at the time I remain grateful and privileged

to have hunted them for so many years. In January 2019 those two cattle properties were bought by Nature Conservancy Australia for water recovery, conservation and protection of the delicate ecosystem which can only be a good thing. ●



A magnificent goanna about to scale a gum tree.

A few hundred ducks out in a weedy lake.





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Step back in time



Shooting the Remington No.2 Rolling Block rifle in .32 Long rimfire.

Senior correspondent John Dunn on shooting a .32 rimfire

If there's a downside to owning old single-shot rifles in obsolete calibres it would have to be they can't generally be fired, particularly with not only some of the more obscure centrefire calibres but also rimfire calibres which are no longer made. Sometimes ammunition may still be available in collecting circles but supply is often limited to single rounds demanding prices the original makers never dreamt possible. Diehards determined to shoot old firearms can usually find their way around such difficulties and with a bit of research and ingenuity, even some of the older and larger calibre rimfire rifles can be brought back to life but the effort involved is usually more than most shooters are prepared to make.

My incentive came in the form of a lovely old Remington No.2 Rolling Block rifle chambered in .32 Long rimfire I bought on the web some years ago. Made from 1873 to around 1910 the rifle is one of the nicest No.2s I've come across. I've written about the rifle before so rather than go into further detail, I'll simply say it's in very good condition, complete with an original Remington tang sight and Beech's combination foresight - it's one of those rifles you can't help wanting to shoot the moment you put it to your shoulder. I'm still not sure why that should be, though I suspect it's a nostalgia thing combined with a dash of curiosity and the need to know how things really were in the days when our current antiques were state-of-the-art technology

and the world was a far simpler place.

As a licensed (NSW) cartridge collector I knew I'd find some loose .32 rimfire rounds lying around in my spares and swaps boxes and a thorough search subsequently turned up 20 rounds with a variety of headstamps. All were fairly dirty so I cleaned them up as best I could and headed for the range only to have my hopes shattered in short order as most of the ammo was well and truly past its use-by date and misfires were common.

Some rounds were loaded with black powder, others with smokeless and not surprisingly, those that did go off tended to shoot to different points of impact - exactly what I'd expect a modern rimfire rifle to do regardless of calibre. That said, I liked the feel of the rifle and the solid crack of the .32 rounds enough to make me want to persist so I took it home, cleaned it then set out to find some shooting ammo.

The cartridge collecting fraternity is widespread and though my early efforts were fruitless I eventually managed to acquire one-and-a-half packets of late-production Canuck ammunition, made by Canadian Industries Limited (CIL) in Montreal - a smokeless load with 80-grain projectiles at a nominal velocity of 1030fps. Both the packets and cartridges are collectable so they didn't come cheaply but I reckoned the outlay was worth it if only to satisfy my curiosity.

It took a little time to have the rifle shooting to point of aim, starting at 25m then moving out to 50m. I folded the

foresight down and used the blade of the Beech's combination sight as I found that easier to see against the target at 50m. Some lateral adjustments of the front-sight with a brass drift and small hammer were necessary to bring the fall of shots on to centre and from there it was only a matter of sorting out the elevation, an easy ask with the graduated sliding aperture on the tang sight.

The photo of my final target shows the .32 rimfire cartridge's reputation for not being very accurate was probably well earned, though don't believe I could've expected any better results given the ammunition would be pushing 40 years



The final 50m group shot with the rifle measured a little more than 52mm.

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- Adjustable regulator
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- 480cc air tank
- Match trigger
- Large magazine



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Step back in time

Remington No.2 Rolling Block.



old and the rifle close to 100. That said I did enjoy the chance to shoot both rifle and ammunition but won't be rushing out chasing rabbits with it any time soon.

None of the .32 rimfires were noted as target cartridges, especially when compared to the contemporaneous and much more efficient .22 Long Rifle and .25 Stevens which were then coming into their own for both target and small-game use. Combined with their reduced effective range and the fact they cost more than the smaller cartridges, it's perhaps surprising any of the .32s hung around as long as they did, though I suspect it had a lot to do with the number of .32 rimfire firearms in circulation, especially handguns.

Though very much outdated in a modern context the .32 rimfires had their time and place in the evolution of modern cartridges and that's how they're best remembered - for someone like me they're an integral part of what makes collecting old firearms and cartridges interesting.

The .32 rimfire family

There are five bulletted cartridges in the .32 rimfire family as well as a variety of shotshells and blanks.

.32 Extra Short

This was used in the Remington-Rider Magazine Pistol (1871-1888) and Chicago Arms Protector Palm Squeeze Pistol (1890s), both small self-defence handguns. Introduced in 1871 it was listed in Remington catalogues until around 1920, the load being 5½ grains of black powder with a 54-60-grain projectile depending on the manufacturer.

The Canuck ammunition used to test-fire the rifle.



Breech open with cartridge in the chamber.

.32 Short

This originated under the Smith & Wesson patent of 1860 and the cartridge was initially used in its No.1½ First Issue revolver (1865-1868). The cartridge was quite popular until the mid to late-1890s and was used by a number of single-shot riflemakers including Stevens, Remington and Winchester, being considered a good small-game cartridge out to 50 yards with Stevens producing its last rifles in the calibre in 1936. The cartridge remained in production until the 1970s then in 1990 Navy Arms had a batch of .32 Short and Long rimfire ammo made in Brazil, some of which has surfaced in Australia. The standard load was 9 grains of black powder with an 82-grain lead bullet.

The .32 Long

This was introduced in 1861 for the Smith & Wesson No.2 Old Model revolver manufactured from 1861-1874 and was later used in a variety of single-shot rifles made by Winchester, Remington and Stevens, particularly in their favourite models of 1894 and 1915. The cartridge was also used in the Marlin 1892 repeating rifle with reversible firing pin which allowed it to shoot either rimfire or centrefire cartridges, the latter known as the .32 Long Centrefire.

The black powder load used 12-13 grains of powder with a 90-grain, outside-lubricated lead bullet at velocity of 950fps. Later smokeless loads used an 80-grain bullet at 1030fps and flattened the 100-yard midrange trajectory somewhat but the cartridge remained a 50-yard prospect at

best with a good reputation for taking small game efficiently without ruining too much edible meat. The .32 Long cartridges also remained in production until the 1970s.

The .32 Long Rifle

This was introduced in the late 1890s, has a longer case than the .32 Long and an inside-lubricated bullet. To quote from the catalogue: "In this form the bullet has a hollow base and will work in rifles chambered for the original outside lubricated cartridges (the .32 Long). It will be borne in mind these hollow base bullets are under the barrel size and do not reach the barrel size until they are expanded on firing." The .32 Long rifle used an 81-82-grain bullet with 13 grains of powder.

The .32 Extra Long

This was introduced in the mid-1870s in a bid to improve the effective range of the .32 Long. It extended the range to around 75 yards but wasn't a particularly accurate or popular cartridge and disappeared from catalogues after World War One. It was chambered mostly in single-shot rifles including those made by Ballard, Stevens, Remington and Frank Wesson and many makers charged extra to chamber their rifles in the cartridge. It used the same outside-lubricated 90-grain bullet as the Long with a powder charge of 20 grains and like the .32 Long was also made in centrefire form, though both were outclassed and eventually made redundant by the much more popular and powerful .32-20 Winchester. ●

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RT270WA	270 Win	130gr	20
RT7MMRB	7mm Rem Mag	150gr	20
RT280RA	280 Rem	140gr	20
RT308WA	308 Win	150gr	20
RT308WB	308 Win	165gr	20
RT308WC	308 Win	180gr	20
RT3006A	30-06 Spr	150gr	20
RT3006B	30-06 Spr	165gr	20
RT3006C	30-06 Spr	180gr	20
RT300WC	300 Win Mag	180gr	20
RT300WSM1	300 WSM	150gr	20

A big, game, hunter

Our Beretta custom-build gave Mark van den Boogaart plenty to write home about

The story so far

If you haven't read our previous articles on the build, here are the details:

- Tikka T3x CTR (left-hand) in .308 Win
- Mesa brand, Tikka Altitude stock in Mohave pattern
- Steiner Nighthunter Xtreme scope in 2-10x50mm
- Burris low-profile hunting-style rings
- Spartan bipod with stock-fitted connection point
- Fluted rifle bolt
- Fully colour-coded with combination of Cerakote FDE (Flat Dark Earth) and Cerakote Smoke
- Fully sourced, assembled and test-fired by Beretta Australia gunsmithing services



The good people at Beretta Australia and *Australian Shooter* asked if I'd like to help design a customised rifle, invited me into the project team, listened to my ideas then went to work and not long afterwards the rifle arrived - a tangible thing from concept to reality. Out of the box we had ourselves a looker with colour-coded fluted components and engraved receiver, a great scope and standout aftermarket stock but it's still a rifle, so it was time to test those looks against shooting performance and it turned out to be a tack driver.

Built on the Tikka CTR platform it performed as good as its reputation, so range visits became more about tuning than trying to make things work. My single-minded brain envisioned a hunting rifle, something designed to be carried all day, used in all sorts of conditions, fired from

whatever rest was available and all with a high level of confidence. Now that kind of rifle had to progress beyond the bench for scrutiny in the field.

Luckily it was late March and rutting red deer stags roaring, bellowing, grunting, scraping and fighting filled the Brisbane Valley. After a text message conversation with the landowner I snuck out the house at 3.15am on the last day of March and after an uneventful drive arrived at the front paddock gate 45 minutes before first light.

Testing time

I'd given some consideration to gear layout and storage so making myself ready in the dark was a quiet, ordered activity. With everything else sorted, packed and loaded I transferred five rounds of Sako Gamehead 150-grain soft-points into the metal box magazine and, smoothly fitting it into place

against a closed bolt, the rifle was safe and ready to go. Around me the early birds were waking and I'm sure I heard the rhythmic thump of a roo moving across the front paddock while behind me cows began to bellow as the resident rooster did what roosters do.

Then I heard it - the guttural grunt of a red deer stag so slinging on the new rifle I crossed the fence line and moved slowly towards the sound. Not wanting to bump a deer in the pre-dawn light I edged right with the wind then held up for a time against a tree and continued to listen. The stag was close which could mean alert hinds were nearby.

With the rising light I glassed two stags on the opposing gully face so began counting tips and considering antler formation and even shouldered the rifle a few times to gauge the feel of things. As I was

in relatively open country and a couple of hundred metres away I increased the scope magnification and adjusted reticle illumination to suit the light. In front of me were two typical Brisbane Valley deer, rough-head double fives though the stag higher up may have been a four-five, it was hard to tell. It wasn't 6am and there were deer for the taking so, feeling pretty good about it all, I decided to leave the stags alone. Backing away I made for a drain that would provide cover as I headed to the east of the block.

After a while I took a break before moving up a long incline towards the top of the block, the rise marking the end of thick green paddock grass and transition to scrub. I was heading for country where things can happen fast so dropped the magnification to just below three power, double-checked the illuminated reticle setting and kept moving.

Almost immediately I heard roaring and being mindful of my foot-falls, I stayed close to cover and spotted a good double five and a smaller stag a little further on. Needing a better look I decided to move up the hill and from my new vantage point could tell the double five was worth taking though the shot wasn't great. As I waited for things to improve the stag moved further away, eventually disappearing over another rise further east.

It had only just gone 7am and I was experiencing the best roar in more than a decade and while my focus was on the stags, deer were everywhere so it was just a matter of finding the right target. I stuck with my slow move uphill and on reaching the top stopped to enjoy the noise. I had three stags roaring, two I assumed on neighbouring properties while the third seemed directly below me in a gully I knew well.

While hard going this gully had produced in the past so I began following the noise. On the descent I spotted spikers and hinds and at one stage was even barked by a hind while the stags continued to roar. Then I spotted him at about 80m. I could see his body (actually his rump) though his antlers were obscured until to oblige my curiosity he began moving towards me. Never taking more than a few steps at a time, over a few minutes he edged ever closer until he was in bow range - and I mean recurve bow range.

Leaving the rifle across my lap the stag eventually spooked and moved up and out of the gully, his quick movement triggering one of the neighbouring stags so the roaring continued as I walked out the gully and on to open flats. The day continued along much of the same pattern of stags, hinds and spikers though in the end I didn't take a shot, which isn't good for testing a hunting rifle but at



Preparing to move (rifle at the ready).



Rifle and kit.

A big, game, hunter



The four-five stag on the opposite gully face.



Mark watches as the spikers assess him.

least I could say the gun brought me luck. Back at the farmhouse I arranged for another visit and gave the farmer my word that this time I'd bring home the venison.

Two weeks later I was back - same time, same place though the rain was falling and it was considerably cooler. The rain gave out with the light and soon I was on the move and as that long wet grass wasn't much fun, dropping a stag pronto felt like the way to go.

Deer down

As the front paddock became illuminated by the dawn light, I spotted movement at the edge of the tree line, a small group of bachelors not good enough to attract or hold hinds. Among them were a couple of spikers which looked like a messy double five and a scraggy double three with the hallmarks of one that'll never make it - what you might call a cull stag - all feeding quietly with only the distant sound of another stag.

It was time to hurry things along and while initially the better of the two was clearly visible as he fed uphill, the shot was terrible and one that was once described to me as a south-facing target on a north-facing deer. I was tucked in close to an internal fence line with the massive amount of grass and wild growth throughout the paddock intensified around the various posts providing excellent cover.

I was 200m from the deer and 70m back from a corner post so my bullet would fly over the wire. The shot was well within the capabilities of the rifle but I decided to reduce the distance as a shot stag may well take off downhill and the corner post would block my view, making it harder to locate

the animal. Following the fence line within about 30m of the corner post, the skinnier one moved out from behind a tree and into the open. Feeding away he presented an easy broadside so I kept moving towards the post and on reaching it gave the rifle a quick check and thought about the shot.

Things were going my way and I was able to brace myself against a diagonal support where I ranged the target at just over 100m and, manoeuvring into a firing position, I sat the rifle atop the post with the leather sling in between. At about 4x magnification combined with the illuminated reticle, the



A red stag approaches.



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A big, game hunter

scope afforded a fantastic sight picture of my intended target. I cycled the bolt and with Tikka rifles being precision instruments, all the sounds associated with a round leaving the magazine and feeding into the chamber filled the air but the deer didn't seem to mind.

Skinny was no Monarch of the Glen but all prey deserves a predator's respect so I waited for my shot. Dropping his head to feed I fired, striking him in the neck. The stag stumbled and fell, momentarily disappearing among the long grass, lantana and scrub though I quickly spotted his darker shape and single antler amid the green so making the rifle safe I walked up to him.

Strangely the other stags didn't immediately depart, with one even moving closer to his downed bachelor brother though eventually my approach scared them off. Prodding the stag with the barrel of my rifle confirmed he was dead and with that I began considering the retrieval. I wasn't far from the fence line which meant I wasn't far from vehicle access so I laid out my meat processing gear and went to work.

I took the quarters and backstraps, a quarter for the landowner, another for a mate and two for my freezer along with the backstraps. I also decided to take the head and while it was no trophy, a friend of my son is interested in our family hunting exploits and wanted a deer's head (what boy wouldn't treasure that on his bedroom wall?)

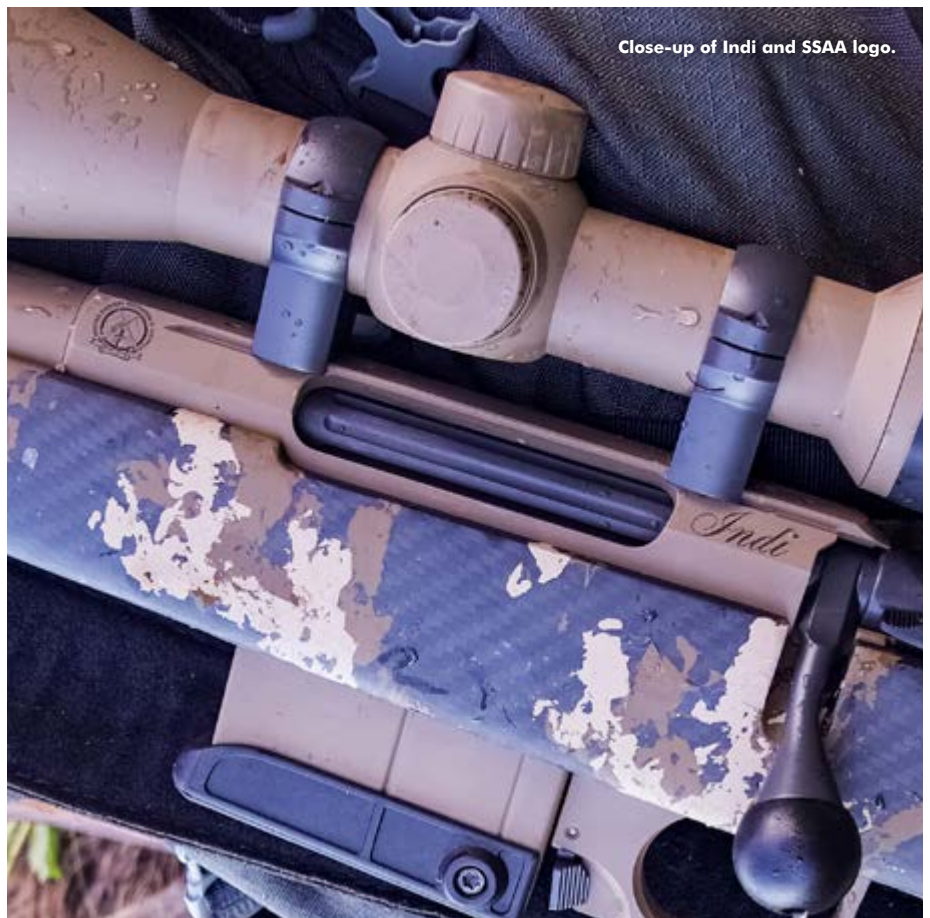
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The 'Indi' Beretta Australia and *Australian Shooter* rifle had passed the test with flying colours, its looks combined with the proven Tikka T3x CTR platform and selected aftermarket upgrades equating to an excellent hunting platform and capable all-round sport shooter. Chambered in the versatile .308 Winchester and firing quality ammunition, the rifle had demonstrated a serious level of accuracy which translated into confidence in the field, all within a package which gave the owner something a little less ordinary.

On a personal note it has been a privilege and a pleasure to be involved in the entire process and I sincerely thank Beretta Australia's National Sales Manager Scott Allen, Workshop Supervisor and gunsmith Byron Young and Marketing Manager Samantha Hogg for all their effort and dedication to the project - and confidence in me as a hunter. ●



Deer, rifle and kit.



Close-up of Indi and SSAA logo.



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The communications port (covered with a rubber plug) is beside the battery compartment.

Dual in the crown

Superb GPO thermal optic gives you the edge, says Con Kapralos

German Precision Optics (GPO) have certainly made their mark in the sport optics marketplace since their inception, with a wealth of experience and know-how to engineer and design cutting-edge products with European flair while being mindful of what the consumer demands along with the all-important value for money aspect.

Their current lines include Spectra riflescopes, Passion binoculars and Rangeguide and Rangetracker rangefinders, top-quality products which have been welcomed the world over, hardly surprising as many of the GPO team are passionate hunters and shooters and know exactly what's required of a sports optic.

The demand and popularity of night vision optics hasn't been overlooked at GPO and they recently released their own offering in the Spectra TI 35 Dual-Use Thermal Device. As the name implies it's a night vision unit which embraces thermal imaging and is of a dual-use design in that it can be used as a handheld unit or attached to the front of a riflescope using a series of adapters. Australian distributor Raytrade sent *Australian Shooter* one for review and having assessed quite a few night vision optics in the past two years, it would be interesting to see what GPO's entry would bring to the table.

At a glance

As expected the GPO Spectra TI 35 arrived in an impressive packaging carton which neatly housed all the optics

and attachments as well as accessories including a neat carry case, data cabling, user manual and lens cleaning cloths. The compact optic measures 120mm x 62mm x 62mm and weighs 350 grams (without eyepiece/adaptor rings attached) and the user manual was read thoroughly to familiarise operation of the unit. Raytrade also supplied a Rusan adapter to attach the Spectra TI 35 to the front of a riflescope, these adapters available to fit most riflescope objective bell dimensions and can be sourced from reputable optics retailers.

Up close

The Spectra TI 35 has several key features which make it a serious option including: lightweight and compact, WiFi and hotspot function, direct/live view through mobile devices, photo and video recording (16GB internal storage), powerbank compatible, seven colour modes, range estimation function, thermal spot tracking, 17.5m horizontal field of view, Picture in Picture (PiP) mode, detection range up to 1300m, three-year warranty.

Contents - the thermal device, two adapter rings, eyepiece, data cabling and carry pouch.



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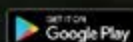
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	PH35L	PH50L	PQ35L	PQ50L
Image Sensor	384×288, 12 μ m		640×512, 12 μ m	
Frame Rate	50Hz		50Hz	
Lens	35 mm, F1.0	50 mm, F1.0	35 mm, F1.0	50 mm, F1.0
Magnification	3.1 - 24.8, 8x	4.4 - 35.2, 8x	1.9 - 15.2, 8x	2.6 - 20.8, 8x
FOV	7.6°×5.7°	5.3°×4.0°	12.5°×10.1°	8.8°×7.1°
Eye relief	45 mm		45 mm	
Display	0.39-Inch, OLED, 1024 × 768		0.39-Inch, OLED, 1024 × 768	
Detection Range	1800 m	2600 m	1800 m	2600 m
Laser Rangefinder	Wavelength: 905 nm, Measurement range: up to 600 m, Accuracy: ±1 m			
Operating Time	8 h		6 h	
Weight	518g	585g	518g	585g
Operating Temp	-30°C to 55°C (-22°F to 131°F)		-30°C to 55°C (-22°F to 131°F)	



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Dual in the crown

Setting up for handheld use is easy - all that's required is for the supplied eyepiece to be screwed on to the body of the optic. Likewise for use as a clip-on attachment, the adapter rings are secured to the body which in turn accept the Rusan adapter that mates with the objective bell of the scope. Rusan adapters must be bought separately and be of the correct size range and whether the unit's used in handheld or clip-on mode, the technical features are impressive.

Externally

Layout of the Spectra TI 35 makes it simple to carry out all operational functions. Up front, the well-designed Tenebraex protective cap keeps dust, dirt and moisture away from the high-quality 35mm objective lens and is straightforward to open and close, being held on a permanent hinge. Immediately behind the lens cap is the image focus dial which can be smoothly adjusted to ensure images are presented clearly and in sharp focus, while on the side is a rubber-covered port to which data cabling can be connected as well as a powerbank.

Next to this port is the battery compartment which accepts two CR123A batteries and changing these is done by simply removing a grub screw. Atop the unit is the power button in front of the main functional keypad consisting of five buttons through which all operations are carried out.

To the rear is a threaded shank which accepts the supplied eyepiece for handheld use. The Rusan adapter was suited to a 38-40mm scope objective and fitted the Lynx 6x38 riflescope on my Weihrauch HW66 in .22LR, a tripod mount also provided as is the case with most optic devices these days.

The Rusan adapter was suited to a riflescope objective bell around the 38-40mm mark.

35mm objective lens with Tenebraex flip on/off lens cover and image focus dial behind.

Internally

The device is feature packed with standouts being the Vanadium Oxide (VOx) detector with an uncooled sensor, pitch size of 17um and resolution of 384 x 288 pixels. Shutter calibration can be set to either manual or automatic and seven filter colours and five special environmental filters take performance to another level with users able to fine-tune to their precise needs.

Video recording, Picture in Picture, automatic hot-spot detection and a digital zoom range of 1x to 8x are other technological features built into the Spectra TI 35. I could go on and on as it has all the capabilities and technology built into it for the most discerning hunter and outdoors person and I recommend any prospective buyer visit the GPO International website to view its full specifications.

In the field

The Spectra TI 35 was used on several night-time activities both as a handheld unit and mounted to a trusty rimfire in pursuit of

some lamp-shy rabbits. As a handheld device it was excellent in spotting any animal with a thermal output and the adjustable magnification range was appreciated in identifying animals quite a long way away, be they cattle, sheep and even field mice.

When it came to my trusty Weihrauch HW66 in .22LR, the Spectra was used to target rabbits on a small acreage and even though shots were taken out to 70m using quad-sticks and the thermal image through the OLED screen set on 1x magnification, the power of the 6x scope on the rifle was more than enough to do the job.

The GPO Spectra TI 35 is a top-quality product with European design pedigree and flair yet priced very competitively. It has an RRP of \$5950 and is available through all Raytrade network dealers Australia-wide. More at www.gp-optics.com ●



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SSAA Firearms Protection

- now it's in your hands



Talking shop: SSAA Media and Politics Officer Rachael Oxborrow with SSAA Treasurer and Mutual Fund Director Alf Bastian.

We touched base with our Treasurer and Mutual Fund Director Alf Bastian to discuss the recent launch of SSAA Mutual Limited. It is a Company Limited by Guarantee and operating as a Discretionary Mutual Fund. It may sound complicated but Alf has tried to put it into perspective during an interview with our Media and Politics Officer Rachael Oxborrow.

Alf is a chartered accountant and has been a SSAA Board member and National Treasurer for the past 25 years. In a previous life he was an audit partner with international accounting and auditing giant KMPG and is also Chairman of the Board of SSAA General Insurance Brokers and now a Board member of the newly-formed SSAA Mutual Limited, the Discretionary Mutual Fund (DMF) providing our members with SSAA Mutual Firearms Protection.

Rachael Oxborrow: Hello Alf and thanks for your time. We're here to have a quick chat about the new DMF and SSAA Mutual Firearms Protection which has been running for a couple of months now. It must've been a big transition from SSAA Firearms Insurance to SSAA Mutual Firearms Protection and I understand you've been working on it for the past 12 months.

Alf Bastian: That's right, it's been a lot of work over a long period of time but it's finally launched. It's a bit like launching a boat - there's lots of pushing and shoving, huffing and puffing and then it gently slides off the trailer and floats away as easy as you like. Launched!

RO: So exactly how long has it taken and how long has this been a work in progress?

AB: It all started about six years ago when Trevor Jenkin was general manager of our brokerage and it was his idea to set up SSAA Firearms Insurance. It was a brilliant idea, a career highlight for Trevor and it took off very rapidly. It was a tremendous offer and such good value for money that 80,000 members - more than a third of our membership - eventually jumped aboard.

RO: Isn't 80,000 from 200,000 members a pretty good strike rate?

AB: Absolutely and a lot of credit for that must go to our mate Paul McNabb who did all the marketing for SSAA Firearms Insurance. Paul's a Past President of SSAA NSW and knows a thing or two about marketing. He says that 80,000 take-up rate is one of the best he's ever seen in his extensive professional career.

RO: So how did the transition from insurance to DMF come about?

AB: As you'd appreciate 80,000 members at \$35 per member represents a lot of money to give to an insurance company every year. So the three of us - Trevor, Paul and myself - started thinking and talking about self-insurance. Firstly Trevor investigated 'Captive Insurance' and we followed that path for about a year but it turned out not to be the right vehicle for the Association. So the whole thing ran out of steam and we scratched our heads for a bit until Trevor attended a Steadfast conference and learned about a vehicle called a 'Discretionary Mutual Fund'. At that time none of us had ever even heard of a DMF.

RO: So that Steadfast conference was the turning point. What happened from there?

AB: I remember Trevor calling me on the Monday after the conference, very excited. It was one of those 'Eureka I've found it' moments so we owe a lot to Trevor. I worked with him closely for 10 years as Chairman of the Board and he took SSAA Insurance Brokers from not much at all to having a turnover of over \$1m in fees and commissions. The company is now a very valuable 100 per cent owned asset of SSAA. Along the way he initiated SSAA Firearms Insurance and eventually found the appropriate vehicle to bring it all home.

RO: Trevor retired from the brokerage last September - what happened after that?

AB: Yes he did and we thank him sincerely for his service over the past 10 years and wish him all the best in retirement. Trevor's

favourite seaside haunt is the beautiful Coffin Bay on the west coast of South Australia and I'm sure he'll be spending a lot more time there. Before he retired he set up all the contacts with the very professional team at Steadfast ART and they've been a pleasure to work with ever since. It has taken another six months after Trevor retired but it's over the line now and is part of his legacy at SSAA.

RO: It sounds like Steadfast are a key element in all this. What's their role?

AB: Steadfast are a huge organisation with multiple aspects to their business. From our perspective they're one of only a few organisations in Australia with a licence to create and manage Discretionary Mutual Funds. They bring to the table the risk management culture and frameworks, structure and experience that's pivotal to the success and longevity of a DMF. We couldn't have done this without them.

RO: Sounds like a big deal Alf. Where do you see it going into the future?

AB: It certainly is a big deal and I see it as one of the biggest things SSAA has done in my 25 years as Treasurer. Relative to insurance it basically 'future-proofs' SSAA in many ways. With the insurance industry navigating its hardest market in 20 years and premiums going through the roof (if insurers offer terms at all) it gives SSAA options. So as far as insurance goes it gives us a bit of 'wiggle room' and flexibility because other insurances can be rolled into the DMF if need be. Aside from just insurance though, SSAA Mutual will build up surplus funds which are retained for the benefit of all members of the DMF.

RO: So meanwhile it's the same \$25,000 of cover for \$35 a year?

AB: That's right, same old same old - except now we own it. ●



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Happy anniversary

Beretta Silver Pigeon 1 a fitting tribute, says John McDougall

It is indeed a pleasure to celebrate with Beretta Australia their 20 years of being in this country. The oldest manufacturing company in the world has been making treasured guns for more than half a millennium and to commemorate their dedicated presence Down Under for two decades - since Principal Luca Scribani Rossi moved here to head the venture - he ordered 500 customised Beretta 686 Silver Pigeon 1 shotguns with customised engraving, individually numbered for collectors and offering a higher grade of wood.

Having owned and reviewed countless Beretta shotguns during my 40-plus years as an outdoors writer, I'm more impressed than ever with this latest offering. The gun mounts well, swings smoothly, looks a treat and is soft on recoil. Steel shot proofed


for high performance loads, the 686 offers everything for the Sporting Clays shooter except a mid-sight which can be added later without charge during the free customer fitting at Beretta HQ in Melbourne.

Barrels

Measuring 760mm (30") these are finished to perfection. Slightly over-bored to 18.6mm (.732") the Optima bore barrels are suited to newer and longer choke tubes which are a huge improvement in technology from their shorter predecessor the Mobil series. Finish on the barrels is also faultless - many years ago Beretta experimented with Bruniton (a Teflon-like coating prone to scratching) but thankfully a return to high-quality, traditional blueing has been adopted here.

The internal bore of the gun is still hammer-forged where some manufacturers prefer to drill their barrels and while this has been a long and proven tradition by Beretta, I believe their higher-grade guns are line bored. The top rib is tapered to draw your eye to the target and topped with a white Trap-style barrel sight, both top and side ribs ventilated to cool the barrels quickly and prevent a heat mirage over the top rib while rapid firing, for example in a 'flush' shoot or duck hunting on the NSW rice fields. Yes, although labelled a Sporter the 686 is also well suited to field shooting, making it a highly versatile shotgun.

At the muzzle the Silver Pigeon 1 Commemorative is fitted with interchangeable Optima choke tubes, five supplied along with a handy case and spanner. The



tubes ranged from Skeet through to Improved Modified, are 90mm long and a great improvement on the Mobil chokes used by Beretta many years ago (they're also made from materials suited for use with high performance steel shot loads).

Extras such as jewel polishing about the monobloc and super-strong ejectors ensure longevity of service, there's bifurcated jointing of the barrels to the rib and the gun is joined to the barrels on each side via slots milled into the monobloc interlocking. Furthermore, replaceable trunions in the receiver provide for simple service should the gun ever need to be re-jointed, for instance if the barrels work loose from the receiver and develop slight lateral movement. I've only ever needed one Beretta re-jointed, a 680 model that would've fired several hundred thousand rounds, so this is very uncommon.

Receiver

This is engraved with unique scenes and while not our indigenous species, the right-hand side features a woodcock in flight

and the left a partridge. Ornate scroll bordering and the Beretta logo along with model of the gun on the receiver floor are all tastefully completed and steeped in typical Beretta tradition, the replaceable hinge pins being robust and engraved with a flower design.

The look of the top lever is perfect as it engages to release the barrels, trunions protruding from the receiver face tapered to lock the barrels while the small nipple

protruding from the top left of the receiver face releases the top lever. This should be done when the gun is stored to prevent loss of tension in the springs associated with the locking mechanism, particularly if the gun is put away for longer periods. The barrel selector-cum-safety catch is in its traditional position on the top tang, is positive in operation and conveniently marked with red dots to help identify which barrel is to be fired firstly - great attention to detail.

Happy anniversary

All surfaces are well inletted including metal-to-metal about the receiver, especially the shoulder where the barrels rest, inletting about the tangs done to perfection and doubtless attributable to Computer Numerical Control-driven machinery. Design of the trigger and generous gold-plated triggerguard is superb, comfortable despite having no adjustable triggerfoot, the inertia-operated trigger releases reasonable though possibly a tad heavy at around 2.27kg (5lb) for each barrel.

Stock and fore-end

These are walnut and stunning for a 686 model. Upgraded to Grade 3 walnut as found on the EELL models, the colour and character of this Turkish wood is magnificent and while a Sporter, the 686 Silver Pigeon 1 Commemorative isn't fitted with an adjustable comb though this can easily be added later.

Design of the fore-end is exceptional - Schnabel or Tulip in design - and generously covered in chequering about 20 lines/inch, action of the lever release adjusted

as is inletting of the fore-end catch into the wood. I was heartened to find a comfortable recoil pad fitted, almost essential when firing high-velocity, high performance steel shot loads and secure for positive gun mount when shooting 28-gram steel or lead Clay Target loads. The pistol grip is typical Beretta, raked with a handful of wood for steady gun control and while chequering about the grip could be a little more generous, at around 20 lines/inch it's more than adequate.

In the field

The 686 was light and comfortable to shoot with the supplied 28-gram RC2 loads which destroyed targets using those longer Optima choke tubes. Balance and swing is delightful and that mid-bead comes in handy to ensure the gun is correctly mounted and not 'canted'. I'm fortunate in having a build which means most guns 'out of the box' suit me well without major adjustment and the Silver Pigeon 1 Commemorative is certainly one of them.

In conclusion, as a user or collector's gun (they're individually numbered 1 through 500) an owner will be more than happy either busting clays or having made a solid investment. With a recommended retail price of \$3999 (shop around), three-year warranty, Beretta factory-fitting and all accessories, you can't go past this one-off sporting shotgun where results were beyond expectation, looks matchless and balance superb. ●

Optima choke tubes are now 90mm long and extend past the muzzle.



A full pistol grip and reach of the triggerfoot were two highlights.



A drop of red enamel designates which barrel is fired first.



Overall view of the Beretta 686 Silver Pigeon 1 Commemorative.

Specifications:

Maker: Beretta, Italy

Model: Beretta Silver Pigeon 1 Commemorative (1/500)

Distributor: Beretta Australia

Overall length: 1230mm/43½"

Barrel length: 760mm/30"

Overall weight: 3.61kg/8lb

Bore size and diameter: 76mm/3" chambered, 18.6mm/0.732" bore

Chokes: Optima, suited overbore barrels and not compatible with earlier models, 90mm long. Skeet 0.742", Cylinder 0.729", Improved Cylinder 0.722", Modified 0.712", Improved Modified 0.707"

Trigger pulls: Both barrels 5lb/2.27kg

Length of pull, drop at comb, drop at heel: Customised with fitting

Warranty: Three years

Recommended retail price: \$3999



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Making sense of choke

David Crofts

It seems that as a whole, shotgun shooters seem overly preoccupied with choke - 'which choke is best for this clay target and that clay target?' and 'which choke is best for shooting long-range ducks?' are just a couple of the questions that arise on a regular basis. When given a shotgun to examine just wait and see how long it takes for the examiner to enquire as to how the gun is choked or if it's a multi-choke, what chokes come with it and I don't believe you'll be waiting for more than a minute or two before the question is asked.

The most important thing to realise about shotguns is not how the gun is choked in the last two or three inches of the barrel/s but whether the gun 'fits' and is balanced to suit your shooting style or technique, though we're not dealing with fit or balance in this article.

Choke was discovered at roughly the same time by W.R. Pape 'the inventor of choke', a gunmaker from Newcastle-upon-Tyne in England and Fred Kimble, a North American who worked as a market gunner during the mid-1860s. However, it's generally accepted that W.W. Greener developed and perfected choke boring during the early 1870s which led to 'The Field Trial of 1875 - Cylinder v Choke bore guns'. After the trial, shooters of the day accepted wholeheartedly the superiority of the choke bore guns.

Choke is generally measured in thousands of an inch, sometimes called points,

so 40 thou' of choke could also be described as 40 points of choke (be aware some European gunmakers do use the metric system). It's generally accepted pattern percentages from the various degrees of choking are as follows*: *Cylinder (40 per cent pattern at 40 yards) - no choke; Skeet (50 per cent pattern at 40 yards) - 5 thou' of choke; Improved Cylinder (55 per cent pattern at 40 yards) - 10 thou' of choke; Modified (60 per cent pattern at 40 yards) - 20 thou' of choke; Improved Modified (65 per cent pattern at 40 yards) - 30 thou' of choke; Full Choke (70 per cent pattern at 40 yards) - 40 thou' of choke.*

* There are numerous variations to the above (regarding choke descriptions, dimensions and performance) due to the many shotgun and aftermarket choke manufacturers. Writer Tom Roster recently noted "shotgun and screw-in choke manufacturers have confused this

issue almost beyond understanding by not agreeing to universal choke-dimension standards but then applying consistent names to chokes anyway such as Full, Modified and Improved Cylinder or $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{1}{4}$, implying universality".

Yet just because a barrel is choked to a particular constriction it doesn't follow the constriction concerned will pattern to the expected percentage associated with it. For example I've seen a barrel with an Improved Cylinder boring of 10 thou' (expected to throw a pattern of 55 per cent within a 30" circle at 40 yards) actually produce patterns on the pattern plate between 50 per cent and 70 per cent by changing nothing more than the type of cartridge being used.

This clearly demonstrates that just because a barrel is choked to a particular constriction there's a good chance it won't provide the performance expected by the user and the only way to be sure of this is to pattern your gun on a pattern plate with the cartridge you intend to use. Ask yourself this: How many people with whom you shoot actually pattern their gun or guns with the cartridges they use?

In the sporting press these days it appears there's a lean towards using a more tightly choked gun for general sporting clay targets and shooting game though I personally believe most shooters actually impede themselves by 'over-choking' when shooting sporting clays and gamebirds. This belief was noted by Bruce Bowlen, a former Director of the Orvis Wingshooting

If doubtful of your chosen cartridge and choke choice, use the pattern plate to check the results.



A bore micrometer is essential for accurately measuring bore sizes and choke constrictions.



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Making sense of choke

Schools: “My experience as an instructor has led me to believe most shooters tend to use too much choke than too little. This is directly related to most folk’s tendency to overestimate range.”

There’s a case for using Cylinder for shots up to 30 yards. Cylinder is an enigma in that it consistently throws the most even patterns of all the various degrees of choke available and this evenness of pattern is supported by the following two statements: “In the thousands of patterns tested by George G. Oberfell and Charles E. Thompson for their *Mysteries of Shotgun Patterns*, the point is made repeatedly that the pure-Cylinder choke throws the most even patterns of all,” (Bob Brister). “The Cylinder had a considerable advantage in one way as its pattern was larger and more evenly spread,” (Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey).

The concept of choke as we know it today arose from the early days in development of the breech-loader when cartridge performance was woefully poor compared with the cartridges available today. The effect of rolled turnover crimps with overshot card wads and propellants of the time (black powder and early smokeless powders such as Schultz) could be vicious on the soft lead pellets as they were forced up the barrel with the wadding then available. You may be surprised to learn most shots are actually taken between 20 and 35 metres from the muzzle, so if most shots at game and targets are taken from 20-35 metres, which is the ‘best’ choke for use within this zone?

Jack O’Connor stated “a gun which will deliver 50 per cent patterns at 40 yards is an exceedingly useful instrument and will do for about 90 per cent of all shooting”. Bob Brister went into a little more detail than O’Connor by saying: “So what we have here is one choke that’s quite deadly for a distance of about 18 yards (from 20 yards to 38 yards with most hunting loads in a 12 gauge) and another (Full) that shines

for 10 yards or so with the same ordinary load. Moreover in the Improved Cylinder’s favour, the 18 yards or so where it is best happen to be the very ones where most hunters can, and do, take their game.”

I’m not saying there’s no place for tighter chokes in shooting - it’s ‘common sense’ that if shooting edge-on clay targets (as in the trap disciplines or the longer range FITASC-type sporting targets well above 40m in range) or long-range game-birds at 40 to 50m - you’ll need tighter chokes to give you the patterns required for efficient kills in shooting targets and game at those distances.

Brister adds: “The Full Choke’s reign of superiority is considerably shorter in useful yards than the Improved Cylinder’s. Between 40 and 50 yards, where the Full Choke shines, even the best of patterns begin to undergo a number of ills inherent to the smoothbore.” So for genuine longer-range shooting the tighter choking does become more advantageous, yet there’s an old saying about choke that “it lengthens your reach but may lighten your bag.” So unless you’re an exceptional shot like Michael Diamond or George Digweed, you may well hinder yourself in most shooting situations by using too much choke.

To break this down to basics, if your clay targets or game are taken at 25m or less (the exception here being trap or trap-type targets) use Cylinder, Skeet or Improved Cylinder chokes. At up to 35m use Improved Cylinder, Light Modified and Modified. If your shots are taken from 35 to 45 metres or more, tighter choke constrictions from Modified through to Full/Extra Full constrictions will be required. After more than 40 years of shooting clay targets and winged/small game with a shotgun I generally lean towards the more open choke borings, dependent upon quarry/target presentation and distance.



A fixed choked can still potentially produce patterns that don’t match the choke constriction with certain shotshells.

No doubt there are plenty of shooters who completely disagree with my ramblings but after a good day’s shooting there’s nothing like having a few drinks with your mates and a debate on what was hit, what was missed and the reasons why - including what’s the best ‘choke’! And if you’re unhappy or have any doubts over your gun/choke and cartridge combination, head to the pattern plate and if satisfied with how they’re performing, leave the pattern plate well alone.

Please note if you conduct your own patterning tests, wear safety glasses at all times when shooting at a steel plate and never, under any circumstances, fire shotshells loaded with steel shot at a steel pattern plate as dangerous ricochets may result.

• References - Bruce Bowlen: *The Orvis Wingshooting Handbook* (1985); Bob Brister: *Shotgunning, the Art and the Science* (1976); W.W. Greener: *The gun and its development 9th Edition* (1910); Michael McIntosh: *Shotguns and Shooting* (1995); Jack O’Connor: *The Shotgun Book* (1965); Oberfell and Thompson: *The Mysteries of Shotgun Patterns* (1957); Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey: *High Pheasants in Theory and Practice* (1913); Tom Roster: *Shooting Sportsman Magazine* (November/December 2017). ●



Multi-chokes come in a variety of shapes and sizes - but are they performing as expected?

Pattern Percentages									
Choke Constriction	Range in Yards								
(US)	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60
Cylinder	80%	69%	60%	49%	40%	33%	27%	22%	18%
Skeet	92%	82%	72%	60%	50%	41%	33%	27%	22%
Improved Cylinder	100%	87%	77%	65%	55%	46%	38%	30%	25%
Modified	100%	94%	83%	71%	60%	50%	41%	33%	27%
Improved Modified	100%	100%	91%	77%	65%	55%	46%	37%	30%
Full	100%	100%	100%	84%	70%	59%	49%	40%	32%

Figures shown are the percentage of pellets from a shotgun cartridge within a 30 inch circle at the given range for each choke listed, ie, A Skeet choke at 50 yards (in theory) should place 33% of the cartridge shot load within a 30" circle at this distance.



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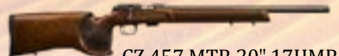
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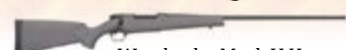


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PRICES SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Sight for sore eyes

Bushnell's RXS-250 a versatile option, says Daniel O'Dea

Recently released by Bushnell the RXS-250 is the latest in their line of quality budget optics, this one a compact red-dot offering that's perfect for mounting on your favourite optics-ready pistol or will be equally at home on a rifle or shotgun, be that either in a primary sight role or offset back-up application.

It comes supplied with a protective rubber sight cover, CR2032 battery, Bushnell multi-tool, sight adjustment tool and lens cloth and is equipped with a Weaver-style plate for direct mounting to any standard Weaver or MIL-STD-1913 Picatinny-type rail. With this mounting plate removed the footprint is the same as on the popular Leupold DeltaPoint Pro series, meaning pretty much any optics-ready pistol will have an applicable adapter plate for direct pistol slide mounting.

The unit is 46.2mm long, 37.4mm high (without Weaver base) and weighs just 40 grams, making it not only compact but light with both housing and hood made

from aircraft grade aluminum. Design of the hood is optimised for the lens to provide a large field of view while remaining structurally durable and is also chamfered so no sharp edges to blister your hands. The lens is 24mm wide and about 16mm high, multi-coated and provides 86 per cent light transmission (the coating also mitigates secondary light sources for a clear picture in all conditions).

The base of the housing is about 10mm high and importantly contains a top-mounted compartment for battery access, a vast improvement on some other RDO (red-dot optic) designs which require removal of the sight from its base for battery replacement. This top access also means you don't have to check or re-zero the sight after battery changes. The unit is powered by a single CR2032 which are not only common and readily available but provide an amazing 50,000 hours of use in the RXS-250 based on continuous use on setting five.



The RXS-250 was supplied with a removable Weaver base for rail fitment.

The RXS-250 has 10 brightness settings for the point-sourced light-emitting diode (LED) beam producing a clearly visible 4 MOA dot. The 10 available settings cover every scenario from the sunniest day to lowest of light applications and Bushnell also claim the sight will work well when paired with night vision equipment. For testing I mounted it to a Smith & Wesson M&P 9 Pro Series CORE (optics-ready) pistol I had on hand. Being optics ready the CORE has its slide cut to accept such red-dot sights without fuss, it's a simple matter of selecting the correct mounting plate adapter and bolting the unit down.



A view of the left side.



The Bushnell RXS-250 is compact and when slide-mounted will work with most polymer and competition-style holsters.

Another great aspect of the RXS-250 is with its low-profile base it provides the ability for co-witness of your handgun's iron sights given the right combination. Many optics-ready pistols these days either come with, or have available as optional, Suppressor Height iron sights which as the name suggests are higher than usual sights originally designed to clear the diameter of a suppressor when fitted, in markets of course which allow such items. With the advent of compact slide-mounted red-dot optics it was quickly realised that with a recessed slide, low profile sight base and these higher-than-normal sights, you'd still have the iron sights visible through the lens of the red-dot optic when mounted, so both the iron sights and red-dot literally co-witness.

Not all RDOs sit low enough to achieve this even with suppressor-height sights but the M&P 9 Pro Series CORE comes standard with such sights combined and with the low profile of the RXS-250 was a perfect match, the iron sights effectively co-witnessing in the lower third of the sight picture. This also makes sighting-in a dream as all you need do is line up the iron sights and adjust the red-dot down to sit on the top of the front sight post and you're basically zeroed in, precisely what I did to good effect.

Bushnell RXS-250 mounted on a Smith & Wesson M&P 9 Pro Series CORE.



The Weaver-style base can be removed for direct mounting using the supplied tool.

Sight for sore eyes

Still on zeroing, the Bushnell RXS-250 has detented windage and elevation adjustments providing clear clicks at 1 MOA per click. Total adjustment top to bottom, left to right, is 100 MOA at 28 clicks to one full revolution for plenty of adjustment range, the top and right-side mounted adjustment screws easily accessed and can be tweaked with the tool provided or any small bladed screwdriver. On/off and brightness levels are controlled via two hood-mounted (one each side) recessed rubber buttons, the left button displaying an arrow pointing up and the right button down.

To turn on just press either button briefly and the red-dot springs to life to display on the lens. Pressing these buttons increases or decreases the brightness (up arrow for brighter, down for dimmer) and to turn off just hold the down arrow button for three seconds. As a default there's also a timer which automatically turns the unit off after 12 hours though this can be disabled by holding both buttons for three seconds with the red-dot blinking three times to confirm the setting change. Repeating this process restores the 12-hour timer.

Having mounted the RXS-250 on the M&P 9 CORE I put it to good use over a few months in range practice and competition, shooting a few ISPC club shoots. I also used the sight-in multiple dry-fire practice sessions while reviewing the Mantis X electronic training system, so literally was able to make hundreds of presentations. By admission I'm fairly new to pistol-mounted optics so there was a learning curve but in the end the Bushnell RXS-250 performed flawlessly, the dot easy to pick up and once I was used to it and no longer fishing for the dot as with most newbies, it was there on every presentation.

I wasn't shy on using the sight to rack the pistol and slapping it around with some vigour the RXS-250 took it all in its stride, maintaining both its zero and retention



Top mounted battery compartment has a screw-off cap.



Cap to the top-mounted battery compartment unscrews for installation or replacement.



Suppressor Height sights and low profile of the RXS-250 let you co-witness with the red-dot in the lower third of the sight picture.

on the slide. If you operate in harsh or inclement conditions there's also some peace of mind in knowing the sight carries an IP67 rating for dust and water, meaning it can be submerged (briefly) without damage so no worries in the rain or if you drop it in a creek.

For the ultimate confidence in purchase the RXS-250 carries Bushnell's Lifetime

Ironclad Warranty, basically a fix-or-replace lifetime pledge which is fully transferable with receipt or proof of purchase - doesn't get much better than that. Lastly the Bushnell is affordable and at time of writing you might even receive a little change out of \$500, making it two-thirds to half the cost of some other popular options so if you're in the market it's worth considering. ●

Specifications:

Make: Bushnell
Model: RXS-250
Reticle: 4 MOA Dot
Adjustment range: 100 MOA
Click value: 1 MOA
Dot colour: Red
Eye relief: Unlimited
Length: 46.2mm
Height: 37.4mm
Weight: 40 grams
Objective size: 25.4mm
Power source: One CR2032 battery
Battery life: Up to 50,000 hours



The Bushnell RXS-250 out of the box with accessories.

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To re or not to re

Consider loading your own ammo, says John Hill

I've been a handloader since owning my first centrefire rifle and believe shooting, hunting and reloading are related parts of the one activity. Handloading extends your interests away from the rifle range or weekend hunt to something that can be done at home, complementing a shooter's outdoor pursuits whatever they may be and it's indeed satisfying to harvest game or shoot a tight group with ammunition you reloaded yourself.

Of the four components making up a rifle cartridge (case, primer, powder, bullet) the case is the most expensive to manufacture yet is the only one to survive when the cartridge is fired, so it makes sense to use it again and most cases will withstand many reloads before being discarded. It's a simple matter to resize the case neck, replace the primer, charge the case with an appropriate amount of propellant (powder) and press a bullet into the case neck.

This process transforms the case into a cartridge again and it's ready to fire once more, so the cost to reload a centrefire cartridge case doesn't include the price of the case, which normally represents a substantial percentage of the overall cost of a new rifle cartridge. Shooters who don't reload see no value in a spent cartridge case, while those who do will often crawl around on their hands and knees in order to find a case ejected into long grass.

Whether to handload or not depends on the amount of ammunition you consume. If a shooter fires fewer than 30 rounds over a 12-month period, as is often the case with deer stalkers or hunters who only go on occasional trips, then buying factory loads is not only logical it's the most economical thing to do. But if annual ammo consumption is in the hundreds then reloading may be a worthwhile proposition.

One appealing aspect of handloading is it allows shooters to make ammunition to suit their particular needs as whether for target shooting or hunting, a handloader can assemble special rounds for a specific

purpose. Cartridge cases can be reloaded at any level from reduced loads using cast lead bullets up to full-power loads, can be loaded with light or heavyweight bullets and 'pet' loads can be made quite different to standard factory-loaded fare.

As an example I use 30-grain Varmint Grenade hollow-point bullets in my .22 Hornet with 13-grains of Winchester 296 powder, a combination that's extremely accurate and comfortably produces a chronographed 3300fps. This particular bullet rarely exits on fox-sized animals and because of its thin jacket construction there's little chance of ricochet - an



The Lee Loader is quite capable of reloading ammo but better results can be had when used with a powder scale instead of the supplied scoop.

equivalent cartridge can't be found in any gunshop. Reloading your own ammo helps make a rifle a little more versatile, simply because handloaders can alter their reloads according to the task they're required to do.

Firearms often favour a certain bullet shape or weight and testing various types soon reveals a rifle's preferences regarding bullet accuracy. A similar situation exists when testing powders as different types produce a wide range of velocities with varying degrees of accuracy. To experiment on this fact-finding mission is known as 'load development', a process which usually ends up with a load of exceptional accuracy, just one of the reasons many shooters handload.

If I've convinced you reloading is a good idea the next thing to consider is what it costs to get started. This is a tough one to answer as reloading tools can be bought for as little as \$50 up to more money than you can possibly imagine. My advice is to go for something mid-range but even that's going to cost upwards of \$500 to buy reasonable quality new equipment that'll withstand many years of constant use.

Buying a budget-priced reloading kit containing everything required is one way to go, though it may contain a few items some would consider as being sub-standard

quality. A lightly-built press made of aluminium won't last as long as a more robust cast iron one but if good quality equipment is bought first up, it could avoid having to upgrade later (and good quality gear is easier to sell if you lose interest). Second-hand presses and related equipment can be bought as a cheaper alternative to new but such reloading tools must be checked thoroughly for excessive wear and abuse. Some handloaders never clean or lubricate their presses, resulting in premature wear and far shorter service life.

The previously mentioned \$50 reloading tool (the Lee Loader) is the cheapest way to start and while it will reload your empties, there are a few aspects some consider irksome. Compared to a reloading press the Lee Loader is slow to use and its powder scoop's capacity is made to err well on the safe side, resulting in under-weight powder charges. Lighter than normal powder charges translates to ammunition with much lower performance levels than full-power loads. And the Lee Loader only neck resizes and can't full-length resize, a



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To re or not to re

big disadvantage when cases become tight to chamber and difficult to extract.

I bought a Lee Loader as I was curious to know how it would perform and found it worked okay apart from the powder scoop aspect. When used with a powder scale and loaded to duplicate a known good load, five shots grouped sub-minute of angle at 100m when fired from my .223 Tikka T3, so a Lee Loader is capable of loading quite reasonable ammo if care is taken during the loading procedures. But be aware the Lee can only load one specific cartridge, so if more than one type of cartridge is to be reloaded a separate Lee Loader will be required for each.

If you decide to go 'mid-range' as suggested earlier, what equipment is needed? Well the list is quite long and starts with a substantial 'O' frame press followed by a set of reloading dies, powder scale, case trimmer, neck deburring tool, case tumbler or at least a neck cleaning brush along with a few odds and ends including case lube and an accurate measuring tool such as a digital calliper.

In addition to all this a suitable powder, primers and bullets will also be needed before reloading can begin. The cost of setting up to reload will buy a lot of factory ammunition and perhaps that's the reason some never get around to reloading. While setting up with new equipment costs quite a few hundred dollars, compared to a new set of golf clubs or a boat to go fishing, reloading is a relatively cheap hobby.

I glossed over the basic procedures earlier and a lot more's involved than was suggested so here are a few more details to consider. Cleanliness is an important aspect of handloading and cases must be properly prepared, including cleaning residue in the primer pocket and neck, both inside and out. This is why some use case tumblers or even ultra-sonic cleaning equipment, both of which do an excellent job of cleaning cases though it's an additional cost and a lot more expensive than a neck brush.

Rifle cases usually stretch with repeated firings and eventually become too long for the chamber they're meant to fit. Neck trimming will reduce the case neck to the correct length which can only be determined with an accurate measuring instrument such as a digital calliper. Case necks also need to be deburred inside and out which requires a special tool if the job is to be neat and uniform.

Anyone handloading for the first time needs a manual or they won't know what type of powder suits the cartridge they're reloading. Reloading manuals as written by Nick Harvey or *Australian Shooter*

columnist Barry Wilmot are pretty comprehensive and contain step-by-step instructions as well as listing our locally made ADI powders. It's in these informative manuals the novice handloader will find how much of what powder behind a particular weight of bullet best suits the case being reloaded (they also give trim lengths should cases need trimming).

Safety's an important aspect of handloading and you must wear safety glasses and not smoke anywhere near highly flammable rifle powders, which is just common sense. Another safety issue is inspecting every case for split necks and imminent head separations before reloading them, as cases can't be reloaded indefinitely - having a case separate when fired isn't a pleasant experience and can do considerable damage to both rifle and shooter. It's also a good idea to stop reloading if a visitor arrives as the process requires concentration without interruption and loading a round without powder is likely to happen when distracted.

To be a successful handloader all you need do is follow instructions from any reputable handloading manual and stay within the recommended loading levels. Yet to do the job properly requires good habits such as an uncluttered workbench, only one type of powder on the bench at a time and the ability to concentrate on the job at hand and it also helps to have an experienced handloader to consult with when in doubt.

The first part of this article may have encouraged non-handloading readers to do so, while the second half dealt mostly with the cost of setting up and that, no doubt, will have completely discouraged some would-be handloaders. But readers should know all the details involved and cost is one of them. If you decide to take up handloading you must be responsible for loading



A Lee die set with a few primed .22 Hornet cases.



The 'O' frame press, so named because of its shape. Shown is a Lee 'Classic' reloading press capable of full-length resizing any case.

safe ammunition as it only takes the use of the wrong powder, too much of the right powder, a bullet too heavy for the powder load or installing a loose-fitting primer to cause trouble, which can take the form of a blown-out primer pocket or completely wrecked rifle.

So if you intend to handload, concentrate on what you're doing and remember to start at low levels (suggested loads) and work up slowly. Handloading is a perfectly safe and interesting hobby for any hunter/shooter to indulge in, provided they stick to the rules. Idiots need not apply!

• Barry Wilmot's *Reloading for Rifles and Pistols* is available from the SSAA online shop at onlineshop.ssaa.org.au. ●

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Long story

Wearing shorts to go hunting is asking for trouble, says Douglas Riach

It may upset some Queenslanders or Territorians who wear shorts when hunting but I just don't understand the logic behind it - wearing khaki shorts doesn't make you look like Steve Irwin or Russell Coight. Shorts may be great on a hot day when sitting around the house or at a barbecue but not out hunting - and I'll give you plenty of reasons why.

Let's start with biting and stinging critters such as ants, wasps, spiders, mosquitoes, leaches and ticks, then come prickly bushes including blackberries, gorse, thistles, Bathurst burrs, box thorn, prickly acacia, prickly pears and hawthorns. Next consider the risk of sunburn so be sun-safe and slip-slop-slap (slip on a pair of long trousers). I won't include those annoying grass seeds which stick to your socks when wearing shorts as gaiters can prevent this.

And it's not just people out hunting as I see strange sights of bushwalkers and hikers sporting shorts, often with gaiters. Where do they think they are - the Swiss

Alps? Australia is full of biting insects and other bugs looking for bare legs to dine on and wearing shorts gives no protection at all and exposes the skin to whatever wants to bite, suck your blood, sting or stick a thorn in your leg.

It's true a lot of the nasty weeds in Australia such as blackberries, gorse, box thorn and thistles were introduced here to join the native leg attackers but that's no consolation for the legs, as many of these grow knee-high and more so while gaiters may keep grass seeds out your socks, they won't protect your legs.

Biting pest such as mosquitos, leaches, ticks, ants and spiders are not restricted to ground level as many of them climb on bushes to await passing people or animals to attach to for a feed of blood. Ants and spiders may not be hunting for bare legs but get upset when you walk through the bush and disturb them, resulting in them attacking your legs. So high boots and even gaiters won't protect you from critters which attach to you as you walk through the foliage.

If hunting as a private individual it's a personal choice as to whether you prefer short or long trousers but if your activity is part of club or organisation, chances are the decision has been made for you. Statements similar to 'safely and adequately undertake the activity', 'protect the health, safety and wellbeing of volunteer members' in club or organisation policies suggests the decision to wear long trousers in the field has already been made.

Terminology varies slightly from state-to-state but the principles of hazard management, administrative controls to reduce risk and the use of PPE or personal protective equipment (long trousers) are the cornerstones of health, safety and welfare. Although not specifically referring to shorts, I note the terminology of 'suitable clothing' appearing in club and association

policies. What's suitable should be based on the activity and risk assessment - if going swimming a pair of bathers would be suitable, out in the sun a hat would be suitable and if hunting in the bush, I suggest the risk assessment will require long trousers.

When volunteering for other organisations there may already be policies controlling clothing as PPE. I recall reading a South Australian Department of Environment and Water policy governing the management of National Parks volunteers and whether culling feral animals or undertaking land-care activities, the policy prohibited wearing shorts. I can only assume other states' National Park authorities and plantation forests have similar health and safety policies for volunteer shooters.

With the rise in mosquito-borne disease such as Ross River virus, Murray Valley encephalitis, dengue fever and Barmah Forest virus, bare legs can't be recommended and even when using mosquito repellent, it's advisable to cover as much skin as possible to avoid bites. Ticks which were once considered more of a nuisance than a threat are now looked on as being more dangerous than first thought (the bush tick can cause paralysis in children and some adults). There are a variety of ticks but all suck blood, eject an anticoagulant into the body and may have poisonous saliva. There have been reported transmission of rickettsia infections, Queensland tick typhus, Flinders Island spotted fever, allergic reactions, Lyme disease or similar symptoms from tick bites and long trousers will help prevent these.

If it's heat and/or humidity you dislike, several manufacturers make lightweight hunting trousers suitable for our summer climate. The old-style bunny ears and love heart camouflage pattern of Australian Army trousers are commonly worn by hunters and are effective in protecting



Desert camouflage trousers (right) with old-style Australian Army (often referred to as bunny ears and love heart pattern) left.

the legs. These trousers are 100 per cent cotton, reasonably light at around 630 grams, breathable and cheap to buy and I also have a pair of desert cam print trousers which are 55 per cent cotton, 45 per cent polyester and weigh around 640 grams.

If you thought the Australian Army bunny ears and heart patterns were too green for the environment where you hunt, the browner shades of desert cam may suit as both these trousers have good prickly resistance. Some companies make hunting trousers with a semi-mesh material which is excellent for breathability and cooling while shading the legs from the sun.

The Cabela's trousers pictured here are 60/40 per cent cotton-polyester and weigh about 490 grams. Featuring a fine mesh arrangement they're designed to be relatively loose-fitting, allowing airflow around the legs and preventing biting critters which may try to penetrate the mesh from coming in contact with the skin. The material of the mesh does, however, retain some burrs.

Kuiu also make a hi-tech 'dot-air' fabric in their Tiburon pants at a lightweight 380 grams, their other hot weather option being the 'Kutana stretch', woven from PrimeFlex nylon and weighing the same, though I don't own either of these so can't comment. True Timber trousers are 60/40 per cent cotton-poly and at 510 grams are another lightweight summer hunting option, the weight surprisingly light considering they have additional thigh pockets and adjustable waist straps. These loose-fitting pants are cool and light to wear with good burr resistance.

Not as light as the other hunting trousers, the Wrangler Pro Gear weigh in at 742 grams and are really a mid-weight

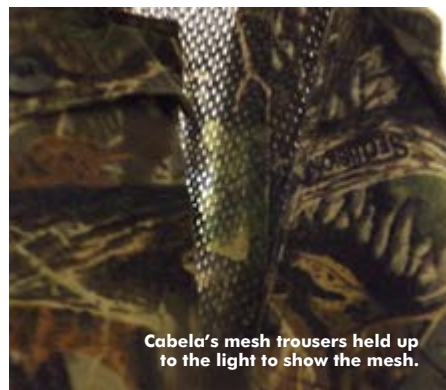
cotton denim made with a camo print. Still reasonably cool, it has the extra thickness to prevent penetration by thorns and tends not to hold burrs. While I did say hunting trousers, I'm referring to either a camouflage or disruptive pattern on a solid colour which blends with the background and environment.

I don't think I need dwell on the advantage when hunting of covering your legs with something which blends with the environment. If not actually hunting (as in walking and stalking) but driving around in a vehicle and shooting, the colour of your trousers may not be an issue but there are still flying, biting and blood-sucking insects around and you have to get out the vehicle on occasions and walk in the Australian outdoor environment which is home to an assortment of pests and nasty vegetation.

Although not touched on above, it's worth also mentioning the protection given to the legs when you come in contact with the ground, either as a result of falling (accidents do happen) or just using your knees to help grip or climb a steep riverbank or adopt a shooting position on one or both knees. Better your trousers come in contact with the ground than bare skin, especially in summer when even a small cut or graze will attract flies and increase the risk of infection in an otherwise minor wound.

Now this was by no means an attempt to put people off hunting and venturing into the great Australian countryside but you should be realistic, consider the hazards out there and wear appropriate clothing - including long trousers - as a control measure to reduce the chances of injury or illness. After all, better safe than sorry. ●

Cabela's mesh summer hunting pants.



Cabela's mesh trousers held up to the light to show the mesh.

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Lotta's rifle

Ivo Dimitrov charts the fascinating history of Finland's far-travelled M24 Mosin-Nagant



The Finnish White Guard or Civil Guard (Suojeluskunta, literally protection corps) was a voluntary militia and part of the Finnish Whites movement which emerged victorious over the socialist Red Guards in the Finnish Civil War of 1918. Finland had been a semi-autonomous Grand Duchy within the Russian Empire since 1809 until the 1917 February Revolution in Russia caused the collapse of Russian political and military power in Finland. The Russian-associated Finnish police were effectively disbanded and in the summer of 1917 paramilitary groups were formed for protection and to preserve order.

Although the founding of these units was often done in a non-partisan manner, influenced by events in Russia they split into two opposing factions (Reds pro-socialist and Whites non-socialist) during the autumn of 1917. The Red Guards usually were able to obtain arms from revolutionary Russian military units while the White Guards took theirs from Swedish and German supporters abroad.

Finnish President Pehr Evind Svinhufvud proposed a Declaration of Independence which the Parliament adopted in December 1917, yet declaring independence was different to being able to exercise control over the country

with the conservative dominated Senate (Finnish cabinet) having nothing but the White Guards to rely on. There were substantial numbers of Russian soldiers still in Finland at that time and although the Imperial Russian Army was slowly disintegrating and had already started to withdraw its units from Finland, it still posed a real challenge to Finnish authority.

In January 1918 the non-socialist majority gave authorisation to the Senate to ask General Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim (who'd served in the Imperial Russian Army) to form a new Finnish Army on the basis of the White Guard militia. During the night of January 27-28, 1918 the White Guards started to disarm and arrest the Russian garrisons in Ostrobothnia while the executive committee of the Red Guards declared the Finnish Socialist Workers' Republic in Helsinki, sparking the Finnish Civil War.

Neither the Red nor White Guard had military training so structures had to be built in a hurry by both sides. The White Army held the advantage as it received Finnish Jaeger troops, some 1900 men trained by Germany since 1915 to fight against Russia for independent Finland, these soldiers able to act as instructors and officers, forming the officer and NCO cadre of the new conscript army. Additionally the White side had 1200



The bolt serial number.

Overall view of the M24 rifle.



volunteers from Sweden (many of them officers) and a significant number of Finnish officers who'd previously served in the Imperial Russian Army but returned home after the revolution.

After four months of bitter fighting the White Guard triumphed and following the civil war the White Guard and Army were split into separate entities with the Civil Guard considered a voluntary part of the Finnish military. After 1921 the Civil Guard organisation consisted of a General Staff, White Guard districts and local Civil Guard chapters, every municipality having at least a single chapter which in part acted as a non-governmental organisation but in military affairs was part of the national chain of command.

In economic terms each chapter was responsible for its own funding, although it received a minor grant from the state budget. The Civil Guard was active in numerous areas of Finnish life and organised sports activities, especially cross-country skiing, shooting, orienteering and Finnish baseball. For fundraising the chapters organised informal events and lotteries with the chief of the Civil Guard and district chiefs selected by the President of Finland. Only able-bodied males aged between 17 and 40 could be full members of the Guard with every member required to attend a specified amount of training. Members were obliged to buy their own uniform, equipment and rifle with help from local chapters and until 1934 the Guard would've formed a division on full-scale mobilisation.

In 1934 the Finnish mobilisation system changed to a new one based on military districts acting as local mobilisation centres



(in practice the military districts coincided with White Guard districts). In case of mobilisation these two would be unified to act as a single home front district, the aim of the Guard no longer to provide ready fighting units but to act as a voluntary training organisation for reservists, effectively ending the role of the Guard as a separate political armed force.

After the Continuation War the Finnish Civil Guards were disbanded in 1944 as demanded by the Soviet Union though the military district system as the basis for mobilisation was retained, now fully as an army structure. In the Winter War the White Guard was responsible for carrying out mobilisation, a quarter of the manpower of the field army consisting of Guard members which proved important, as these were the best trained and equipped personnel in an army which lacked a lot of basic supplies in 1939.

Focus on the M24

Finland found itself with almost 200,000 M91 Mosin-Nagant rifles in its possession after breaking away from Russian rule in 1917. In addition it bought around 100,000 more M91s primarily from Central Powers

countries like Germany, Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria who'd captured them in World War One, those rifles forming the basis of Finnish infantry arms until the adoption of a self-loading rifle many decades later.

Initially Russian rifles were simply refurbished but the Army and Civil Guard quickly found the Model 1891 pattern wanting and began developing improvements. The two organisations managed their arm production independently until ultimately the Army and Civil Guard came together to design the apogee of Mosin-Nagant evolution, the M39, but that's another story.

One of the earliest Finnish arsenal rebuilding programs was undertaken by the Finnish Civil Guard (Suojeluskunta) to refurbish worn-out Russian M91 rifles into the M24 as most M91s had been in continuous use for about 30 years at that stage. The Suojeluskunta sought bids from companies in Switzerland and Germany to produce replacement barrels, the initial contract awarded in 1923 to Swiss firm Schweizerische Industrie-Gesellschaft (SIG) in Neuhausen am Rheinfall.

The Civil Guard-SIG relationship persisted into the future as SIG supplied the first batch of barrels for the M28 which

replaced the M24. Another contract to a German arms consortium made up of Venus Waffenfabrik and Romerwerke was awarded in 1924, SIG barrels marked 'Schweiz-Industrie Gesellschaft Neuhausen' on the right of the chamber just above the stock with German barrels bearing 'Böhler-Stahl' on the underside of the chamber, after the steel manufacturer-barrel blank maker.

The first order of 3000 Swiss SIG barrels were dimensionally identical to those on the M91 with the remaining SIG barrels and German-made barrels being heavier. The diameter of the barrel was increased by about 1mm to improve accuracy and these were produced with a 'stepped barrel' near the muzzle to accommodate the standard Russian Imperial bayonet. The M24 barrels are undated and have the Finnish Civil Guard crest (an S topped with three fir sprigs in a shield) on top of the chamber.

The rifles were fitted with two-piece spliced stocks less prone to warping in cold temperatures while changes were made to deepen the barrel channel in the forestock, a deeper handguard inlet and improved trigger with a coil spring added to take up trigger slack and improve trigger pull, these changes introduced in mid-1925. Many rifles were also fitted with a cross bolt through the forestock just behind the nose cap to retain the front barrel band so the barrel band could be left loose, thereby eliminating a pressure point and increasing accuracy.

Eventually the Finns did away with this modification in favour of using small wood screws to secure the loosened barrel bands. The Konovalov

stepped rear sight was retained but renumbered from arshins to meters while the front sight was replaced with an improved notched one for better visibility in lowlight conditions. The Finns didn't make any receivers or bolts, opting instead to recycle those of their existing stock of M91s.

Assembly of the M24 was at Suojeluskuntain Ase-ja Konepaja Osakeyhtiö, the Finnish Civil Guard workshop that would eventually become better known as SAKO, funds for the refurbishment of the M24s raised by the Civil Guard women's auxiliary known as the Lotta Svärd, the M24 later nicknamed 'Lottakivääri' or 'Lotta's rifle' by troops who carried it into battle in at least three wars.

Production ceased in 1928 but the M24 remained in service until the Guard was disbanded in October 1944 as part of the Armistice conditions with the Soviet Union, Civil Guard guns then turned over to the regular army with most marked SA (Suomen Armeija - Finnish Army). Due to the low number of M24s made and high loss and attrition rates during the Winter War, Continuation War and Lapland War, the M24 is highly sought-after by collectors, production running from 1924-1928 with an estimated 26,000-27,000 rifles made.

One example has a German-made barrel which has been stepped down. On the side of the receiver is the Civil Guard district number (S73678 which corresponds to Suur-Saimaa) to which it was issued but has been crossed out and the rifle reissued to another Civil Guard district with the number 73452 (which corresponds to Lahti). This has also been subsequently crossed out, presumably after the Guard was disbanded. ●



The rear sight marked out in metrics.

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Stayin' alive



No pan, no problem as bannock can be cooked on an open fire using a forked stick.

Making bread in the Outback is simple, says Thomas Tabor

Some of my best memories in life have been simple ones, like enjoying a meal cooked over the open flames of a campfire well away from what most people recognise as civilisation and usually those fares have been unpretentious and basic, maybe consisting of only bread with some form of protein.

Mankind has always relied on bread as a staple and it remains that way even today. In the early years sometimes bread took the form of what was commonly referred to as hardtack or sea biscuits, this unique product being important for explorers and pioneers and as long as it was stored in a dry environment free of insects, it had the ability to remain edible sometimes for decades. The problem was - like the name hardtack seems to imply - in order to reach such a state of complete preservation the bread turned out to be almost as hard as the tarmac we drive our cars on.

Often in order to avoid damaging the eater's pearly whites (or in those early days their dingy yellows), the hardtack had to be soaked first in coffee or occasionally a little firewater before attempting to eat it as doing so worked to both soften the hardtack as well as making it more palatable. Of course there's little call for this type of bread these days but if you're looking for a long-term survival food which, when stored properly, could last for years it could still have usefulness.

Basic sea biscuit recipe

- Ingredients: Two cups of whole wheat flour, one cup of water. Note: A little salt can be added in an effort to improve the flavour and even in a few cases a tablespoon of butter was sometimes added though that could stimulate spoilage and considerably shorten usability.

Once the water has been added to the dry ingredients the dough must be kneaded but that should only last long enough to remove any lumps in the dough. Working the dough excessively can result in the end product

being too light, too flaky and brittle which in this case are considered undesirable characteristics. Roll the dough to a thickness of around 10mm then cut it into whatever shapes you prefer (historically the biscuits were cut into squares possibly for easy packaging and storage).

When the dough has been cut to shape, perforations should be made by sticking a fork or other sharp object repeatedly into the surface as this helps prevent puffing and formation of air pockets when cooking. These too are considered signs of a poor-quality product which can lead to premature



Hardtack or sea biscuits were once made commercially and sold to travellers.

spoilage and even provide places for insects to set up residence.

Once the biscuits have been formed they should be placed on baking paper and baked at 230C for 25-30 minutes. The final product should be light-yellow or tan in colour and when struck on a hard surface the biscuit should give off a noteworthy 'ring' as a sign of its high quality and, if placed in water, a good biscuit will float to the surface.

With the exception of possibly an end-of-the-world survival scenario, hardtack may now have outlived its usefulness but a better product which still has a viable place in the modern world and in particular the outdoors is bannock, also known as bush bread, trail bread, grease bread or fried bread. While the basic ingredient of flour is at the heart of both hardtack and bannock, the main difference between these two types of bread lies in the way they're cooked and their palatability. Unlike hardtack, which is often prepared and cooked in some form of an oven then stored for later consumption, once bannock is cooked it's generally consumed straight away.

Easy bannock recipe

- Ingredients: One-two cups of flour, half tablespoon of baking soda, quarter teaspoon salt or to taste, small amount of water to form the dough (makes a single-serve biscuit 3-4" diameter). Note: Some recipes call for adding a bit of fat to the mix which often took the form of bacon grease, lard or margarine. I don't add fat to my mix as the other ingredients keep longer and even without it your bannock will assuredly taste good.

And best of all, bannock is very tasty.

One of the great things about bannock is its flexibility as the dry ingredients can be easily mixed at any time and stored for future use, though in this case the ingredients should be sealed airtight and kept dry to avoid insect problems. For this I use a Ziploc-style plastic bag which allows me to conveniently carry those ingredients in my pack or coat pocket when I head afield. Even if I only intend to be gone a few hours, conditions and circumstances can rapidly change and, if they do, having that little pack of bread mix with me can be instrumental to both survival and comfort.

Once you're ready to cook your bannock all you do is pour a little water directly into the bag followed by kneading the dough from outside the bag. It's important to add water gradually, keeping the dough fairly dry particularly if you don't have a pan to cook it in. Once kneaded your bannock is ready for cooking and if wild berries are available those can be added

for flavour. In some cases other available ingredients (like cheese) can also be included and once the cooking has been completed a little jelly, jam or honey can provide even more benefit.

Obviously if you intend frying the bannock in a pan you'll need some form of grease to prevent the bread from sticking but you can also cook without a pan in a couple of different ways. The dough can be wrapped in tinfoil then positioned close to the campfire and another simple method involves cooking it on a stick over flames, much as you'd cook a sausage or marshmallow. For best results the stick should be forked with each fork being about 10 to 15cm long and the points being separated by about 5 or 6cm. It's important you know the type of wood you intend to use for the stick as some can be poisonous.

As long as your dough is fairly dry it can be easily formed around the fork then all you do is hold it over the fire, rotating occasionally until your bread is cooked through to its centre and golden brown in colour. Bannock works great for a quick-to-prepare meal in the outdoors but is equally good at home on the dinner table and in this case is quick to fix, easy to cook and you'll be surprised at how good it tastes. ●

The dry ingredients to make bannock are simple - flour (bleached or whole wheat), baking soda, salt and water.



Thomas carries a bag of dry bannock ingredients in his backpack.

Happy days



School cadet training takes John Maxwell back to more innocent times

Older shooters might fondly recall the heyday of school cadets in the 1950s, '60s and '70s where armouries were stacked with SMLE rifles and members learned infantry minor tactics, charging through the bush while blazing away with blank ammunition. Best of all, annual camp meant the chance to fire SMLEs and Bren guns with live ammo and maybe also the Army's then principal infantry weapon the SLR.

In 1975 then-Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam ended all that, withdrawing Commonwealth support and effectively disbanding the cadets, though it didn't spell their end. In that era of the Vietnam conflict, Labor won office in 1972 with a policy of ending conscription as it appeared to have been most concerned about compulsory participation in some cadet units, particularly in private schools. It wasn't about the guns as this was still a time when cadets could ride home on the bus carrying an SMLE without attracting the attention of a SWAT team.

The end of Commonwealth support meant the end of the government largesse which had allowed cadet units to flourish

- uniforms, rations, transport, training and much more. Then under the new coalition government, cadets were reinstated in 1976 although not as they had been. Gone were the warlike activities which had given cadets a particular distinction from other community youth groups such as scouts, the new government preferring community-based rather than school-based units.

There were other changes along the way but the biggie occurred under the John Howard coalition government in 2001 and followed yet another review, conducted by then-Defence parliamentary secretary (technically the junior Defence Minister) and later Defence Minister and Director of the Australian War Memorial Dr Brendan Nelson. This set the pattern for what has since followed, including formalising of policies on allowing young unlicensed members access to and training on firearms.

With its record of being tough on guns from the 1996 National Firearms Agreement (NFA) to sustain, Howard's cabinet took a close interest in this issue, considering the matter at a meeting in September 2001. The submission from then-Defence Minister Peter Reith

- released in January by the National Archives of Australia under the 20-year withholding rule - was entitled 'Military-like activities and firearms training for the Australian Defence Force cadets'.

The upshot? Defence would continue to provide cadets with instruction under close supervision on the issue Steyr F88 rifle with access to the Weapon Training Simulation System where available. Defence would draw up a list of military-like activities it considered inappropriate for youth development and supply some innocuous non-firing versions of the Steyr for drill and ceremonial activities, while also assessing the feasibility of supplying dummy red rubber Steyr lookalikes for drill and ceremonies.

Most significantly the government agreed firearms training for Defence cadets could also be delivered through gun clubs using bolt-action .22 rifles under civilian shooting protocols. That would be available only to cadets enrolled for at least 12 months and subject to parental approval, the preferred rifle being the familiar and readily available CZ 452. Twenty years on that still seems to be the case.

Defence's Youth Policy Manual (YouthPolMan in the inevitable acronym) says training in firearms safety and handling, including live-firing of small-arms, is a feature of ADF Cadets youth development programs and one of the features which attracts young people. "ADF Cadets provides the opportunity for participants to experience the safe handling of firearms, including simulated and/or live-firing practices," it says. "Security policies may impose practical constraints on ADF Cadets gaining access to Defence weapons. The use within the ADF Cadets of Commonwealth procured, owned and approved CZ 452 bolt-action rifles in .22 Long Rifle calibre (cadet firearms) provides a means for increasing the accessibility of firearms training to cadet units."

Defence doesn't heavily promote opportunities for firearms training for cadets, it's not mentioned at all on the Army Cadets website, with just fleeting mentions on websites for Air Force and Navy cadets. In Reith's cabinet submission of two decades ago some interesting issues were raised, particularly because allowing cadet access to military weaponry and even civilian .22 calibre rifles butted heads with the NFA. That of course is the 1996 agreement between states, territories and the Commonwealth which banned semi-automatic rifles and pump-action shotguns, introduced national firearms registration and imposed tougher licensing conditions.

Commonwealth Cadet Forces Regulations of 1977, made under the 1903 Defence Act, permitted cadets to carry Commonwealth-owned firearms without the need to hold a licence, which meant back in those days cadets travelling by bus or train with a .303 rifle did so quite legally. How times have changed.

The review of cadets conducted by Dr Nelson recommended that regime be allowed to continue with minor regulation changes which would've permitted cadets to carry and use non-Commonwealth owned firearms for authorised activities at registered rifle clubs without having to meet state or territory licensing requirements. Was that ever going to happen? Certainly not. Reith's submission said this measure wasn't in keeping with the intent of the NFA in that it could circumvent state and territory licensing requirements.

Yet this left another problem in that some school cadet units operating under state-sponsored youth programs had 'no-weapons' policies and Reith wasn't about to use Commonwealth muscle to impose different policies and such units would have to miss out. "Given the 'no


weapons' policy in those state youth programs, sponsored cadet units would not be able to enter into arrangement with registered rifle clubs," his submission says.

The submission includes a summary of the recommendations which says cadets should be allowed to experience an elementary level of Infantry Minor Tactics (IMT) using innocuous or dummy firearms though doesn't say what IMT would be acceptable, maybe very basic section drills such as patrolling. But it does list unacceptable activities. Bayonet training wasn't allowed and neither was assaulting a physical enemy, defending against a physical enemy or ambushing. Paintball and video games depicting combat activities weren't

permitted although there was nothing to stop cadets doing both in their own time.

Older readers may remember how different their own cadet experience was in the pre-Whitlam years, when units practised realistic contact drills armed with fully-functional .303 rifles and blank cartridges, patrolling through the bush and bailing-up pretend enemy at gunpoint. This writer's unit wasn't issued with bayonets or hearing protection and this was an era long before violent video games. We were given explicit warnings on the dangers of blank cartridges, warnings which don't seem to be universally applied to some in the Hollywood movie business. ●





A small mob of does feed during the rut.

Sole-searching

Despite stalking in his socks, Billy Allen claimed his first solo buck

It was mid-morning over Easter when I arrived. Reflecting on times gone by I'd been hunting this estate with my father since I was a boy but this would be a special one for me as it was the first occasion I'd be hunting fallow bucks by myself. I love to hunt with dad but as we grow older and take on more 'life' responsibilities, it becomes harder to organise rosters and the necessary time off work to go away together. At that time dad and I had hunted the past two roars and seen some reasonable heads but nothing worth taking though I'd scheduled this one well as the bucks were going at it hell for leather, roaring from late afternoon, most of the night and well into the morning.

On arrival a courtesy call was in order as a couple of mates were also hunting the

property, so for safety reasons top of the agenda was to work out with them where we'd all be hunting over the next few days. I struck it lucky when we agreed I'd be hunting a gully about a kilometre from camp which had held some reasonable bucks on the two previous roars.

It's an agreement on this property that only 'trophy' bucks should be taken during the roar with the standard starting at 180 Douglas points. Fallow deer antlers are notoriously hard to judge on the hoof and usually it's only when you have them on the ground you can see just how good a head really is. I was after a buck with symmetrical antlers, reasonable length with good palms at least the width of my hand with well-formed brow, trez and guard tines. At 3pm I reached the area I intended

to hunt and had only walked about 80m off track into the dry, crisp scrub when I heard the first buck grunting. I was on a low ridge overlooking a gully that ran back to a dam and after checking the wind direction I removed my noisy boots. Underfoot was crunchy, decomposed granite carpeted in dry foliage and it's near impossible to move close to anything there while wearing boots. On previous occasions dad and I hunted in our socks which allows you to walk very quietly as you can feel every rock and stick and it's surprising just how quietly you can move in these conditions wearing only socks.

The wind was blowing up-gully towards the dam and the buck was 100m in front of me grunting and well hidden in thick scrub. Still in my socks I quietly moved



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Two years on and Billy's no longer a one-gun hunter as he poses with another buck taken with his Sako .300WSM.

off downwind before changing direction to swing back in for a closer look until suddenly the wind whipped around, blowing my scent in his direction. Luckily he hadn't detected me and continued to grunt, so I carefully backed out and moved to the opposite side of his stand to keep the breeze in my favour. As I reached a position to begin a stalk the wind changed again, blowing my scent directly towards him. It's common on this property for the wind to swirl and is something we've had to accept and allow for over the years.

Knowing the buck was so close yet not being able to see him was both testing and exciting, so back I went through the scrub to my original stalking position and no sooner had I arrived than I heard him moving in my direction. He was grunting as he walked towards me, whacking his antlers on trees and bushes so I quickly moved into position for a shot, using a small tree as a rest and quietly chambering a round in my stainless Ruger .243 with the Tasco World Class 2-7 set on 2x.

The rifle was a gift from dad on my 12th birthday and it's all you need for fallow deer if you're a one-gun hunter he told me. My handloads were 100-grain Hornady projectiles in front of 42 grains of AR2209 powder for a velocity of 2998fps, this load grouping at less than MOA in my rifle at 100m and spot-on at 200m.

The buck was still grunting loudly as he burst through the scrub only 20m ahead of me but sadly he was a fork horn, probably a two-year-old with his second head but he'd been making the noise of a giant. He hadn't spotted me so I stood still and let him move off and out of view as I engaged the safety catch. I was disappointed he wasn't bigger as he'd have been an easy shot but that's hunting. A short time later I located a fresh rutting stand when I realised I didn't quite know where I was - geographically embarrassed. Yep, I was lost! All my concentration had been on hunting and not on where I was actually going as I moved through the scrub. I'd only gone another 10m into the wind when I looked up to see a deer staring





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Sole-searching

at me from no more than 5m away, a nice young menil-coloured buck but just another fork horn and after giving me the once over he bolted, not knowing what I really was. I was wearing AusCam hunting clothes and camo paint on my face and hands so may have looked like a wannabe soldier, but it works well in the Australian bush. With nothing to lose I gave my best impression of a fallow buck grunting and to my great surprise the young buck came back for a second look. He again sized me up and this time with no doubt in his mind I wasn't another deer, he was gone for good.

I could now hear a couple of other bucks grunting deeper into the scrub so slowly moved in their direction, careful not to make any noise as I watched and listened, when in an instant something came crashing towards me through the scrub at high speed. I shouldered my rifle as a doe came running straight for me, only swerving a few metres in front of me, while close behind her a buck was in hot pursuit and as she veered off he stopped abruptly to look at me.

He was a brown-coloured buck with decent palms, good length of antler and nice tines. "You'll do nicely," I thought as I placed the cross-hairs in the centre of his chest and squeezed the trigger. At the shot he jumped into the air then ran about 10m to my right before propping again. He was obviously hit hard and I was elated as I moved in to inspect my buck with his beautiful, even head and everything I was after - easily bigger than the minimum standard we'd set of 180 Douglas points.

By now the sun was starting to sink behind the hills to the west so it would be soon be dark and I'd stupidly forgotten my torch. I'd also left my camera behind and only had the mobile phone so I quickly took some photos of my buck before starting to cape him out. I'd never caped a trophy by myself as dad was always the knife man but before long, with a bit of care and without too much trouble, I'd removed the cape and head for a shoulder mount.

Still unsure of my exact location I set off in the direction I thought camp was and to my great relief eventually came across a track I recognised and after finding my bearings it was an easy walk back to camp in the dark. That evening I finished caping out the head and had my buck scored by a mate and was elated when he registered 195 Douglas points. Not quite the magic '200' which many hunters aspire to but still pretty good for my first solo fallow buck - and from a hunt I'll never forget. ●



The buck's head after being mounted.



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The Helia RF 7x25 was put through rigorous field testing.

Within range

Kahles superb monocular won't break the bank, says Chris Redlich

Two years ago I had the good fortune of reviewing the Kahles Helia rangefinder 10x42 (RF) binoculars and was impressed by their performance while field-testing under tough conditions, yet I shouldn't have been surprised considering the Austrian company has more than 188 years of experience in producing world-class optics. The Kahles name is renowned throughout the Australian shooting fraternity and there wouldn't be many hunters who haven't used one of their scopes at some stage.

All new from them is the handheld Helia rangefinder (RF) monocular 7x25 and while at first glance it's not dissimilar to the compact nature of most other RF monoculars on the market, what

immediately caught my attention was how it felt in the hand. The Kahles engineers have clearly refined the traditional round-edge feel to incorporate a more contoured yet firm and ergonomic grip and I can speak with experience here as I've owned another brand of rangefinder monocular for years and without doubt this Helia RF handles much better.

Weighing a mere 214 grams (with battery) and at only 100mm long the unit goes virtually unnoticed when stowed in your trouser pocket. Kahles provide a soft nylon pouch for belt attachment if you prefer to carry it that way but I generally use my pockets though a wrist lanyard comes for added security when using in a harsh environment.

The Helia rangefinder has a fixed seven-times magnification and image viewed through a 25mm objective lens, hence the 7x25 in the name. It has eye relief of 15mm and the rubber eyecup/dioptrre ring on the ocular lens is fully adjustable for a clear image, the 25mm objective lens allowing for generous field of view of 117m at 1000m.

The battery compartment sits directly below the ocular lens and the unit is powered by a single CR2 battery. Sticking to a familiar formula for right-hand set-up, the power 'on' and ranging button are set within comfortable index finger operation and the mode button is accessed easily by the thumb on the left side to the centre of the two lens barrels.





The neck strap works well.



Kahles supply a protective nylon pouch for attaching to your belt.



Accurate long-distance range-finding achieved as the box-style reticle enables easy target framing

Within range

Operation and performance

The best part of reviewing any electronic device is testing its features to see how it performs in the field. For some reason I've always been interested in how such a compact item can be of so much assistance to a hunter when rangefinding is crucial to the success of an outing, so let me briefly explain the rangefinder in basic terms. The unit is pointed at a target where the beam is projected and reflected back, the distance calculated in milliseconds by the internal electronic processor which measures the time it takes for the reflected beam to return.

Boasting a maximum 2000m ranging capability (with a +/- of 100m error at 2000m) this little unit by Kahles is by far the best rangefinding monocular I've used, its fast target detection leaving my own rangefinder in its wake. I can reflect with disappointment that my unit, which is apparently rated to 1000 yards, would often struggle to measure any distance past 600 yards and that could be in perfect conditions using a rest. Not so with this new Helia - I was impressed on my first field outing as it enabled me to accurately assess distances way beyond 1500m without a rest.

Pressing the mode button on the left opens the operator up to the Helia's additional key features including ambient temperature readings (Celsius or Fahrenheit), air pressure in hectopascals (hPa), patented enhanced angle compensation (EAC) function for angle correction, angle indicator, scan mode and battery life indicator.

The high-quality organic light-emitting diode (OLED) display is crisp and has a total of five brightness levels enabling the user to adjust for all light situations, ideal for overcast or bright and sunny conditions (I found level 4 fitted my needs best). Scan mode is an important function and as with the previously reviewed Helia RF binos this monocular is equal to the task.

By continual depression of the range-finding button you can track your moving target and the distance will update every half-second, particularly useful if for instance you're tracking a scurrying mob of pigs across a paddock. Like all moving ferals they'll eventually stop and when they do you'll be fully aware of their distance and adjust your sights for correct shot placement accordingly.

Angle compensation isn't a new concept in rangefinding devices but the Helia EAC is on the money for assisting with angle deviation. In EAC mode the compensation measurement is displayed above the aiming mark and I must stress that for targets on slightly angled hills at close proximity the



EAC isn't much use, but this feature comes into its own when calculating fall of shot at distance in steep terrain. Alternatively the angle (in degrees) is available for those who feel the urge to calculate their own angle compensation by mathematical means.

Lastly but still important is the Helia reticle or aiming mark. Kahles have kept it simple by providing a single square-style reticle for the purpose of fast acquisition and it's very effective as I discovered while field-testing. Unlike some rangefinders with a cross-hair style reticle which tends to 'drown out' an object, the OLED box-shape aiming mark allows the operator to capture or encompass the target easily, especially in detecting small game a long way away. I found the box aiming mark worked like a picture frame when ranging a boar more than 1.5km away and as long as the pig remained within the frame, the 7x magnification coupled with Kahles' laser electronic processing enabled easy rangefinding from a sitting position.

Conclusion

For those who may not be able to afford a top-end rangefinding binocular configuration, a compact monocular is definitely the way to go. The Kahles Helia 7x25 M, retailing for \$849 at time of writing, is a small price to pay for a compact unit offering big advantages to the hunter. The Helia RF monocular, made in Myanmar, is backed by Kahles' two-year warranty and rest assured that for an optics company with such wealth of experience, you're guaranteed a quality product. ●



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As the stock arrived with red varnish finish.

Hail the 45-90

A converted gem from the SSAA Gun Sales website put Joe Norris to work on his dream rifle



Comparison of 45-90 (left) and 45-70.

Pandemics have an annoying habit of halting your hunting plans in their tracks, so I was doing my usual daily web check when something for sale on the SSAA Gun Sales website really jumped out at me – a converted Martini-Henry chambered in 45-90. I contacted the seller and after a brief conversation bought it on impulse, probably because I hadn't seen a 45-90 in a Martini action and being a single-shot tragic and owner of several Martini rifles in various calibres, I just had to have it. And the asking price was within my meagre budget so the deal was done.

During my conversation with the seller he told me that due to the length of the 45-90 case, the lever had to be held down so the case could be chambered, as the feed ramp on the block was too high to allow

the straight-walled case to feed into the chamber. I already own a 45-70 Martini so was aware of the potential issue and holding down the lever while feeding a round into the chamber isn't a big worry – I was more concerned about extraction of fired cases. The seller told me that wasn't a problem though he'd only used Trail Boss loads so didn't know how it would go loaded-up.

After paying for the rifle and applying for my Permit to Acquire, I waited impatiently for it to show up at the gun dealer's and several weeks later I picked it up. The timber was covered in a sort of red varnish and the fore-wood bare where the stock had been cut when it was shortened, the barrel taken from a Ruger No.1 originally in 45-70 and still stamped as a 45-70. It was also still fitted with the standard Ruger No.1 sights and had the normal

Ruger rings included. The metalwork was good and when the rifle was converted to 303 the breechblock was fitted with a dovetailed piece to the face for the firing pin prior to being rebarrelled to 45-90.

A closer look at the buttstock revealed faint original military markings beneath the varnish so I decided to try to strip the varnish and revert to an oiled stock. Having never done a stock refinishing job I researched and found I could source what I needed from a hardware store, so proceeded to buy some paint-stripper and give it a go. On disassembling the rifle I put gel paint-stripper on both stock and fore-wood and waited for the old finish to bubble up before wiping it off, though concerned I might damage the timber I didn't leave it on long enough and ended up doing it four times before I had all the old varnish and



Fore-wood showing the raw wood cut.

A closer look at the buttstock revealed faint original military markings beneath the varnish

stain out the wood. Next I took some fine sandpaper and lightly sanded the stock as I didn't want to remove the cartouches but didn't want that red stain either. I already had some Tru-Oil so used that to treat the stock and with a light sanding between coats, applied it four times to achieve a dull semi-gloss appearance which I much prefer to the original varnish. The stock still carries a lot of cracks but in fairness it was built in 1885, so I think after 137 years it just adds character.

After searching local gunshops for cases and drawing a blank, I tracked down 60 at Rebel Gun Works in Brisbane and snapped them up then by a stroke of luck some appeared online and I bought 100 from Evans Arms in Tasmania. While buying the cases from Barry Evans, we started talking about the calibre and I discovered Barry



The rifle stripped and ready to remove the varnish.



had competed worldwide in black powder long-range shoots with it and while I wasn't interested in using black powder in my rifle, I asked him for some guidance in developing loads. He told me what he'd used in the past and where to start looking for suitable loads and between Barry and my copy of the ADI powder guide, I settled on a starting load of 50gr of AR2207 in Bertram brass and Winchester large rifle primers behind a Speer 300gr hollow-point projectile.

I took the rifle to a dry irrigation water storage pond I use as my rifle range and as it's 400m across and surrounded on all sides by high earth banks, it provides the ideal sighting-in range both from a safety aspect and wind shelter - I just tuck into the side the breeze is coming from and have a relatively wind-free range. The first shot felt good, the case ejected easily but the mouth of the case down to about halfway was sooted up, indicating there wasn't enough pressure to seal the case in the chamber. My next shot from the five rounds I'd loaded was the same but the third didn't fire and when the case ejected the powder spilled out and the projectile was left in the barrel.

Back home and a light tap with a cleaning rod removed the projectile. Initially I thought there wasn't enough

powder in the case and I'd been lucky to escape without a secondary explosion even though the case was better than half full, so I pulled the remaining two cartridges. I had some loaded at 60gr of powder and thought I'd try these but after the first shot going off without any fuss and the case ejecting without soot, the second one again failed to fire. When ejected the powder was fused into a pellet the same size as the inside of the case and when rolled in my fingers broke up into the usual-looking powder granules, although they were slightly discoloured.

Clearly the primer wasn't lighting the powder despite the fact it was fusing it together on ignition. On talking to Barry again he suggested I try magnum primers as that's what he used to set off his black powder loads, so I decided to load some with magnum primers and a bit less powder in a bid to secure a proper chamber seal. After consulting the ADI book for 45-70 loads I opted for 55gr of 2207 with magnum primers and, to see what speed I had, I'd run these over my chronograph.

These loads fired perfectly and ejected without any hassle and according to my chronograph they're 2332pfs so I see no reason to load them any hotter at this point. I fully intend to hunt with this rifle and

don't imagine anything I'll be shooting will need a hotter load than that to harvest ethically. I may go to 400gr projectiles at some point in the future but for now I'll use up all the 300gr ones I have.

• The loads mentioned in this article are safe in my rifle but I don't recommend using them as a starting load - always start with lower charges and work up while keeping an eye out for signs of excessive pressure. ●



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Black beauty

The Franchi Horizon Varmint impressed Con Kapralos

Back in 2017 Franchi, a division of Benelli Armi of Urbino, Italy ventured into uncharted waters by releasing their first bolt-action hunting rifle in the Horizon, marketed in the US as the Momentum. Such a brave move would normally be faced with some trepidation but with the global backing of Beretta Holdings the success of the Sporter was guaranteed. Since then the Horizon has seen various models released, all centered around a general-purpose hunting rifle with a Sporter barrel and largely synthetic stocks.

The 150th Anniversary model had fancy timber and there are walnut-stocked versions available overseas but the Horizon's forte was being a rifle you'd sling across your back and walk hill and dale without worrying about the elements. It was only a matter of time before the team at Franchi would start to explore other

options in the Horizon line, namely a dedicated varmint rifle specifically for shooting long-range prone or from a rest.

Late last year Beretta Australia received the first shipment of Franchi Horizon Varmint rifles which consisted of the Black Synthetic in .308 Winchester and Camo Cerakote Synthetic in .223 and .22-250 Remington, the former forwarded to *Australian Shooter* for evaluation paired with a superb Steiner Ranger riflescope and test ammunition from Sako and Sellier & Bellot.

At a glance

The rifle is a full-size turn-bolt repeater with 24" (610mm) fluted varmint barrel and purpose designed polymer stock with detachable comb. It comes supplied with two detachable box magazines (3 and 8-shot), a fitted Picatinny rail and muzzle brake, comprehensive user manual,

warranty card and test target. It weighs 3.83kg and measures 1130mm (without the brake fitted).

Action

The receiver and bolt are identical to the standard Horizon Sporter, the receiver made of circular steel bar-stock and well finished to exacting tolerances, circular in design and measuring 215mm which includes a small rear tang. The receiver tube is 172mm x 34mm with a well-defined ejection port on the right with top milled flat, drilled and tapped in the Remington 700 pattern for scope mounting provision.

Thankfully Franchi have fitted a Picatinny rail as standard while the left side of the receiver body houses the bolt release lever on the rearward section along with the inscribed serial number, model name and country of manufacture. The right side is devoid of markings with the exception



Franchi Horizon Varmint Black Synthetic in component form.

Left side of the action with serial number, model name and country of manufacture.



of proof marks on the rear ring and the receiver is finished in matte blue to complement the barrel.

The bolt is called Relia by Franchi and is touted to be ultra-smooth, efficient and solid in operation, 'solid' being an understatement as it measures 78mm x 25mm and weighs 395 grams, being made of steel with the body and bolt head finished in hard-wearing nickel plating. The bolt head is of a three-lug design which allows 60-degree lift and accommodates a spring-loaded plunger ejector through the bolt-face and claw extractor on the rim of one of the lugs which permits unhindered ejection and extraction of fired and unfired cases from the action.

The bolt body has a long slot milled in which mates with a corresponding lug in the receiver wall for smooth and efficient bolt travel, the only blued components being the rear bolt shroud with

characteristic triangular design and the bolt handle and knob. The bolt knob's conical design is of a tactical nature but comes to the hand beautifully, being slightly swept back and perfectly placed for instinctive shooting and cycling of the action.

Barrel

This gives the Horizon Varmint its purpose being 610mm (24") and tapering from 27mm in diameter at the knob form down to 22mm at the muzzle which is threaded to accept the supplied muzzle brake and protective

cap. The barrel is of chrome molybdenum steel and cold-hammer forged to achieve its profile, the barrel surface having a series of five spiral flutes over 350mm which reduces weight but adds to the surface area for increased cooling.

In the .308 Winchester chambering (the only calibre offered in Black Synthetic) the one-in-11" rate of twist is touted to handle projectiles in the 150-180-grain bracket though it would be interesting to see how a lighter 130gr pill would fare.

Black beauty

Trigger, safety and magazine

The Relia trigger by Franchi is fully adjustable from 0.8 to 1.9kg and from the factory was set at 1.4kg but broke cleanly and crisply with no excessive creep or drag. Varmint hunters and long-range shooters may look to adjust the pull weight to around the 1kg mark and while this can be carried out using the instructions in the user manual, a competent gunsmith is the way to go.

The safety is a two-position affair just behind the bolt handle notch and working in a linear manner, the most rearward position blocks the sear/firing pin but permits the bolt to be cycled and the chamber loaded or unloaded. Moving the selector to the fully forward position the rifle can fire as per normal and the bolt cycles, with a small red dot on the stock indicating this position.

The triggerguard and magazine shroud are a single polymer unit, the front of the guard also housing the magazine release lever which easily disengages the secured magazine for removal. The arrangement on the Horizon Varmint continues with a detachable box magazine version which was introduced on the Horizon in 2019, earlier models having the standard floorplate system.

Stock

The design required a stock completely different from the Sporter configuration and Franchi opted for a unit with terrific innovations. The layout follows the Exclusive Style (XS) design from the 2017 model made of techno-polymer with some major changes coming with the Varmint model. First is the comb worked into the buttstock which is imperative in a rifle that'll be shot prone or from a rest, the comb supplied being medium height and removable.

A steel stud holds the rear of the comb securely in place by mating with a steel



The bolt is nickel plated and fluted for slick travel and reduced weight.

A muzzle brake is supplied as is a protective thread cap.



Aluminium 'V-block' in the floor of the stock mates with recesses milled into the sides of the front receiver ring. The barrel free-floats along its entire length.



A nice touch is the removable pistol grip inserts.



Picatinny rail supplied as standard.

clip in the rear while the front of the comb mates passively with a small extension in the buttstock 'cut-out'. When shooting, the comb sits securely without the slightest movement and Franchi also have high and low options so users can find the best cheek weld simply by changing the comb. One drawback was the need to remove the comb at the range though it was straightforward.

Franchi Horizon Varmint Black Synthetic in .308 Winchester as tested with Steiner Ranger 6 optic.



Bipod attachment is via sling-swivel cups rather than studs and there's one on the fore-end underside and another on the butt-stock toe (thankfully Franchi have removed the integral sling swivel studs previously part of the stock-moulding process).

There's provision to install a separate swivel stud just forward of the fore-end cup and Franchi's Twin Shock Absorber recoil pad is fitted.

Another feature is the removable pistol grip insert which sits in place once the triggerguard is fitted and rifle assembled but can easily be removed when taking out the stock (it lends itself to an interchangeable pistol grip). An aluminium 'V-block' is inletted into the polymer body of the stock and mates with two slots milled into the sides of the receiver tube which does away with the need for a recoil lug arrangement and actually gives a superior bedding

system with the barrel free-floating in the process. The rear of the receiver bears directly on to the polymer and the barrelled action is secured with two action screws.

At the range

A Steiner Ranger 6 in 3-18x56 optic was supplied with Burris Zee rings and fitment of a Picatinny rail as standard made scope-mounting a breeze. The rifle was thoroughly cleaned to remove any factory preservatives and five 3-shot groups at 100m (off a benchrest) were carried out over several sessions, the barrel cleaned between ammo changes.

Even though the rifle was supplied with a muzzle brake it wasn't used as recoil in the Horizon Varmint in .308 Winchester was never an issue. The rifle shot brilliantly and while I confess to not being a benchrest or target shooter, some

extraordinary single-figure groups from the Sellier & Bellot 180gr Soft-Points and Sako Gamehead 150-grain Soft-Points showed what the rifle's capable of, all average groups well under 1MOA (28mm at 100m). The stock with its XS-ergonomics, TSP recoil pad, raised cheekpiece, palmwell pistol grip and varmint fore-end made for a complete shooting comfort experience.

Overview

The release of the Franchi Horizon Sporter in 2017 came as an affordable sporting rifle while subsequent versions have only improved and the Horizon Varmint in either Black Synthetic or Camo Cerakote will do well in a competitive market. The Horizon Varmint Synthetic Black in .308 Winchester retails for \$1149 and is available via the Beretta Australia dealer network. More at berettaaustralia.com.au ●



Accuracy testing at 100m - groups in mm

Ammunition	Best	Worst	Average*
Sellier & Bellot 150gr SPCE	11	31	21
Sellier & Bellot 180gr SP	8	28	22
Sako Gamehead 130gr SP	13	33	24
Sako Gamehead 150gr SP	7	25	19
Sako Blade 162gr	20	26	22

* Average group calculated from five 3-shot groups.

Best groups shot with the Franchi Horizon Varmint Black Synthetic in .308 Winchester.

SPECIFICATIONS

Manufacturer: Benelli Armi, Urbino, Italy

Model: Horizon Varmint Black Synthetic

Distributor: Beretta Australia

Action: Turn-bolt repeater

Barrel: Chrome molybdenum cold-hammer forged 610mm (24"), one-in-11" rate of twist

Muzzle: Threaded for muzzle brake (supplied)

Calibre: .308 Winchester

Magazine: Detachable box, two supplied (3 and 8-shot single stack)

Overall length: 1130 mm (without muzzle brake)

Weight: 3.83kg (bare as tested)

Stock: Composite polymer with detachable comb (optional comb height available)

Safety: Two-position

Trigger: Single-stage adjustable 0.8-1.9kg

Warranty: Seven years (mechanical parts only)

RRP: \$1149

National

National Junior Rimfire Rifle Metallic Silhouette Postal Championships

March 1-July 31, 2022

All clubs and branches

Program: 40-shot match under current SSAA National rule book. No nominations fees apply. See National website for full event details. Contact: juniorsports@disciplines.ssaa.org.au

National Junior Rimfire Field Rifle Postal Championships

June 1-October 31, 2022

All clubs and branches

Program: 40-shot match under current SSAA National rule book. No nominations fees apply. See National website for full event details. Contact: juniorsports@disciplines.ssaa.org.au

SSAA 10m Precision, NRA 3x40 3P, Field Rifle Postal Shoot National Championships

June 1-August 30, 2022

All locations

Program: Shot in accordance with current SSAA Scoped 3-Positional & Field Rifle rules from June to August 2022. Contact: Jennifer Ingram jenniingram1978@gmail.com

SSAA Combined Services National Postal Shoot

June 1-September 19, 2022

All clubs and branches

Program: Rifle: Event 1 - 3P core event Match 1 Standard Rifle (graded); Pistol: Event 1 - 3P core event Class 1 Handguns (graded), Class 2 Handguns (graded) Class 3 Handguns (open), three classes may be entered. Contact: Steve Knight 0428 876 991.

SSAA Gallery National Championships

July 23-24, 2022

Para Branch, Greenwith, SA

Program: Events will include Multi-Target 1, Timed and Precision 1, 1020 Match in Standard and Classic rifles and 1500 Match. Nominations will be received up to the start of events. Facilities: Canteen for snacks and drinks. Contact: Don Robinson 0428 986 070 or Dave McCarthy 0414 880 333.

SSAA (WA) Sporting Clays State Championships

July 31, 2022

Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA

Program: 100 Sporting Clay targets. Contact: Neil Cobb 0404 040 357 or neilcobb@bigpond.com

SSAA Fly Shoot National Championships

August 19-22, 2022

Big Springs Range, Wagga Wagga, NSW

Program: August 19 set-up and practice; 20 Light Gun 500m Fly; 21 Heavy Gun 500m Fly; 22 200y Rimfire Fly. Facilities: Catering breakfast and lunch all three days, camping with showers, toilets, cooking facilities, \$10 per person for all the event schedule. Contact: Greg Chapman chappo555@bigpond.com

SSAA Combined Services National Championships

September 30-October 2, 2022

Central Queensland Shooting Complex, Gladstone, Qld. Program: Check National website. Paid catering available (pre-order). Free camping at range with toilets and showers (no power). Contact: Ken Innes: 0427 668 450.

SSAA IMHSA National Championships

September 30-October 7, 2022

SSAA (ACT) Majura

Program: Sept. 30 Practice; Oct. 1-3 Small Bore and Field Pistol; Oct. 4 Practice; Oct. 5-7 Big Bore. Contact: Russell Mowles handgunsilhouette@disciplines.ssaa.org.au or Cheyne Fischer ihmha.act@gmail.com

NSW

SSAA (NSW) Benchrest State Championships

June 30-July 3, 2022

Dairyville Range, Coffs Harbour, NSW

Program: See National website for full event details. Contact: Ian Thompson: 0499 212 260 or isp_projectiles@yahoo.com.au

SSAA (NSW) Combined Services State Championships

September 16-18, 2022

Windamere Regional Shooting Complex, NSW

Program: Full details on National website. Prizes: Medals for all rifle events, Top Gun and Top Gun Junior. Facilities: Barbecue and basic kitchen facilities, camping and caravans permitted at range Friday to Monday, male and female toilets and hot showers. Contact: Anthony Gatti info@nswcsd.com.au

Vic

SSAA (Vic) Single Action Black Powder State Championships

July 9-10, 2022

165 Giffins Rd, Little River, Vic

Program - Saturday: Long Range, four main stages, dusk shoot. Sunday: Six main stages. Facilities: Free camping (limited powered sites), showers, toilets. Contact: Tony Diablo 0419 187 980 or email diablo6@bigpond.com

SSAA (Vic) IHMSA Big Bore State Championships

July 21-24, 2022

Eagle Park, Little River, Vic

Program: Production, Revolver, Standing, Unlimited, Unlimited Any Sight, Unlimited Half Scale. Contact: metallicsilhouette@iinet.net.au

SSAA (Vic) IHMSA 80-shot Ram Slam State Championships

August 26-28, 2022

Eagle Park Shooting Complex, Little River, Vic

Program: 80-shot Ram Slam, Production, Revolver, Standing, Unlimited. Contact: metallicsilhouette@iinet.net.au.

SA

SSAA (SA) Fly Shoot State Championships

July 16-18, 2022

Monarto Shooting Complex, SA

Program: July 16 Practice; 17 200yd rimfire fly, target competition; 18 centrefire 500m fly. Facilities: Barbecue, showers, toilets, cooking, camping (\$5 per night). Contact: Pat Kitschke 0455 280 024, (08) 8349 6544 or whytiger49@hotmail.com

SSAA (SA) Lever Action Metallic Silhouette State Championships

August 20-21, 2022

Moonta Shooting Club, SA

Program: Saturday 8am Practice; 9.30am 80-shot Cowboy Rifle Silhouette. Sunday 8am Practice; 9am 40-shot Small Bore CLAS; 1pm 40-shot CLAS Pistol Calibre. Facilities: Camping on range with power, limited facilities (drinks, sundries but no showers). Contact: Shane Peters 0427 242 312.

SSAA (SA) Field Rifle, 3P, Scoped Air Rifle, NRA any sight State Championships

September 3-4, 2022

SSAA Para, Greenwith, SA

Program: September 3 - NRA 3P (60 shots); 10m Precision Air Rifle. September 4 - 3P 10m Air Rifle. Facilities: Canteen at range all day, camping on range with showers, toilets, power. Contact: Paul Rawlings 0403 436 905 or paulee06@bigpond.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 prms@ssaaqld.org.au

SSAA (Qld) Field Rifle and 3 & 4P State Championships

August 19-22, 2022

SSAA Gladstone Branch

Program: August 19 Practice; 20 RF Field Rifle (42 shots), CF Field Rifle (42 shots); 21 RF NRA 3P (60 shots), CF 4P (40 shots). Facilities: Free camping, toilets and hot showers (no power), access from Thursday morning. Food and drinks Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Contact: Jennifer Ingram 0418 259 269 or Leanne 0421 017 404 (after 5.30).

SSAA (Qld) Action Match State Championships

July 23-24, 2022

SSAA Bundaberg, Qld

Program: Barricade, Falling Plates, Moving Target, Practical, Production and Metallic on Saturday, Open on Sunday. Facilities: Lunch and refreshments, camping, hot showers and toilets available by prior arrangement. Contact: Shane McEwan vp@ssaabundaberg.org.au

Tas

SSAA (Tas) 5-Stand State Championships

November 4-6, 2022

TII Huon Combined Shooting Club, Tas

Program: November 4: Side-by-side 50 targets; Sub-gauge 50 targets. Nov 5-6: State Championships 100 targets each day. Facilities: On-site camping with toilets, full canteen (cash only). Contact: Dale Foggio 0408 361 638 or dalepest@msn.com (email preferred).

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.

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 Victoria 2022 AGM notice

2022 Annual General Meeting and postal ballot

The AGM will be held from 2pm to 4pm Sunday, September 18, 2022 at Hotel 115 Grill & Brewhouse, 115 Cotham Rd, Kew VIC 3101.

Nominations to fill three Board vacancies will open May 23, 2022 and close June 24, 2022.

Nominations to be posted to **Returning Officer SSAA (Victoria), PO Box 336, Nth Melbourne, VIC 3051**; or emailed to frank@ybg.com.au

Results of the postal ballot, which opens August 1, 2022 and closes August 26, 2022, will be announced at the 2022 AGM.

Financial accounts for the year ending April 2022 will be available at ssaavic.com.au prior to the meeting or upon written request.

For details contact the State Office by telephone :03 8892 2777 or email: state_office@ssaavic.com.au

By order of the Board, SSAA Victoria

Sign up a JUNIOR

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

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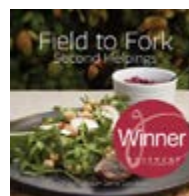
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Look stylish in the great outdoors with one of the new SSAA Buffwear which come in five great options – Iron Bark, Bullet, Distressed Leaf and Oz Flag.

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SSAA Renegade Jacket

The SSAA Renegade Jacket is made from wind and water-resistant breathable material and lined with cosy microfleece to keep you warm. The clamshell jacket comes with a structured hood to keep the rain off and has a multitude of zippered pockets to keep your belongings secure in the field, on the range, while hiking, hunting or just out and about.

\$94.95

Please visit our website for measurements for correct sizing



SSAA Competition Shirt

Look smart and feel comfortable with the new SSAA Competition polo shirt, with short sleeves to give you a competitive advantage. Featuring a variety of logos from the SSAA's most popular supporters, the shirt is made of 100% Polyester and has a UPF rating of 30+, blocking out 97% of UVA and UVB rays.

Available in sizes Medium to 3XL

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Digi Camo Shirts long-sleeve shirts.

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\$54.95

SSAA Rechargeable Knife Sharpener

The SSAA Rechargeable Knife Sharpener uses an abrasive belt sharpening system that operates on batteries located in the handle. It is designed to sharpen every knife you own. Use it on straight or curved knives, filleting or serrated blades and even scissors! It is the only knife sharpener you will ever need.

\$89.95



SSAA Bush Kettle

These custom-made bush kettles run on a few twigs and leaves and will boil water in less than 10 minutes. Simply take a handful of twigs/leaves and kindling then place under the kettle and light it - the clever design directs heat into the kettle to boil the water.

The kettle can be used with gas stoves and has a stainless construction.

\$84.95



SSAA Camping Lantern

This lantern is lightweight and ultrabright, with 450 lumens. Simply pull the SSAA Pop Up Camping Lantern upwards to turn on and push closed to turn it off. When you want overhead light, use the metal 'arms' to easily hang it. Runs on three AA batteries.

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Membership No.

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Last name

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That sixth sense

With the benefit of hindsight I've come to realise the years I spent working on wild dog control was some of the most productive hunting time I've had in my life, not just for the results we produced but also what I learned about looking for and seeing, recognising and feeling what was going on around me in the bush.

Through constant practice the work helped me develop a sixth sense about the dogs and other animals we sometimes found, knowing where they were likely to be without really being able to say why other than I had a feeling. It was a useful asset and one that was easily transferable to other species I later hunted.

The first time it kicked in was a morning I'll always remember. We were running a line of traps along the western boundary of Budawang National Park, trying to put a leg iron on a problem dog which had been killing sheep for several months. As we dawdled around a bend in the trail my late mentor and hunting mate Cliff Croker leant forward and peered through the windscreen.

"Pull up," he hissed at me, "that trap's gone." I stopped the truck and we climbed out being careful to make as little noise as possible. Marks in the sand told us the dog had walked down the trail, been distracted by the decoy scent and cautiously stepped over the trip stick which defined the edge of the set. He'd raged when the trap first clamped around his leg, biting at everything in reach then realised his predicament and headed for cover where at least he'd be hidden from prying eyes.

The drag attached to the trap had left a clear trail heading towards the withered head of a wind-blown tree. Cliff went right while I edged around to the left, moving slowly and looking carefully. Suddenly and for reasons I couldn't begin to explain I knew the dog wasn't under the head of the tree, he was in a barely visible hollow down near the vertical root plate.

I whistled softly at Croker to catch his attention and using hand signals showed him where the dog was. Cliff nodded, cocked his rifle, whimpered like a pup and right where I thought he'd be the dog stood

up and turned his head towards the noise. We both fired at the same time.

Since those days that same sixth sense has helped me pinpoint a lot of game including deer, pigs, goats and once a buffalo who thought he was safe in his personal patch of pandanus - and just the other day an urban fox which haunts us hereabouts. We never know when he'll turn up but this particular morning he'd marked a ground-level stump and I didn't need Dixie to tell me how fresh it was. The way she sniffed along his scent trail gave me the direction he'd travelled and if there'd been anyone with me, on the spot I'd have bet them a good bottle of red I knew where the fox was.

At the bottom of the block there's a short line of unpruned pine trees, their lower branches sweeping down to ground level. The sun strikes them early, creating warm and secluded spots for a cold fox to lie up on a frosty morning - a place rarely disturbed by man or beast. There are numerous escape routes and an approach can only be made across open ground so why wouldn't a savvy urban fox choose to camp there for the day?

As Dixie nosed into one end of the trees the fox slipped out the other, squeezing through the fence and bobbing away through the paspalum clumps with their sticky, drooping seed heads. The dog showed no inclination to follow as she hates the long grass and given we weren't hunting she was happy to watch the fox weave away, both of us knowing there wasn't much we could do about it anyway.

I smiled to myself, chuffed that my feeling about the fox had been right and the old sixth sense was still working despite a lack of regular recent practice and, perhaps more importantly, my bottle of red was safe.



Dog skins and traps from another time and place - a sixth sense about the dogs was an important asset for those involved in their control.

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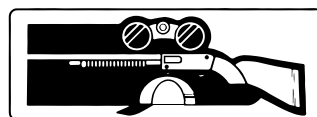
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