

Worth the weight: Howa M1500 Carbon Stalker breaks the 3kg barrier

AUSTRALIAN

March 2023
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Shooter

THE MAGAZINE FOR SPORTING SHOOTERS



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New all-Aussie Taipan
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REVIEWS

- Kahle's Red Dot Compact sight
- Caldwell's new shooting bench
- Polaris thermal turns up the heat



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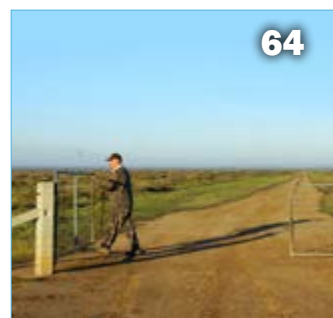
The latest laser rangefinding binoculars from German outfit Steiner - their Predator LRF 10x42s - have raised the bar in the field of hunting optics and our reviewer Chris Redlich was suitably impressed when he could calculate distances freehand out to 1800m in poor light.

Exposure to lead particles from shooting, particularly at indoor ranges, is something we should all be aware of as it can potentially be a health hazard. Dr Penny Hutchinson has addressed the subject and outlined ways shooters can minimise risk and take suitable precautions, especially for handloaders.

The Winchester XPR rifle in .350 Legend calibre is available to Australian shooters in two models, Synthetic and Extreme Hunter, and we laid our hands on the former which, for hunting purposes, our reviewer reckons will "mimic such proven calibres as the .30/30 Winchester and 7.62 Soviet with its ballistics".



Our March cover - see page 16



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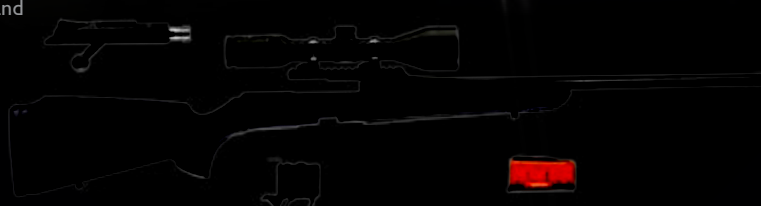
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SSAA backing Scottie's push for Paris glory

The next 12 months will be crucial in Scottie Brydon's push for the 2024 Paris Paralympics and the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (SSAA National) is proud to extend its support for him into 2025.

His tenure as SSAA National's ambassador began in 2019 and has allowed Scottie and the SSAA to actively promote the shooting sports as being for everyone. Scottie uses a wheelchair and has competed in Paraplegic Olympic Trap events, setting a new world record in qualifying for the WSPS Championships at Sydney International Shooting Centre in 2019. His shooting career began in his hometown of Cobarr, NSW before he relocated to Canberra to be closer to competition and training facilities.

"I really enjoy fulfilling this role with the SSAA," he said, "as it allows me to highlight the fact that anyone can take part in the sport of shooting either as a hobby or all the way to elite level. When it comes to age, ability and shooting, nothing holds people back from being involved. It's an amazing sport."

While the direction of Scottie's shooting career has altered slightly in recent years, his motivation to reach the Paralympics remains unwavering. He made the switch from Trap shooting to rifle events in early 2020 when the Paris Paralympic line-up changed to exclude his preferred shotgun competition and the move to focus on rifle shooting has forced Scottie to review his processes and approach to competitions.

"I'm feeling good," he added. "My scores and training have been going well so far. I'm working on confidence in competition settings and my processes so I can perform under pressure. You're training for one day of competition - there are no second chances - so it's vital I put in the hard work now."



Action man: Scottie Bryden has his sights set on Paris.

During the past 12 months Scottie has been gathering momentum towards his Paralympic dream, having competed in World Cup events at Chateauroux, France in June and South Korea in August. He performed well at the Melbourne International Shooting Centre Grand Prix in November, taking gold in 10m Air Rifle SH1 and was also named in Shooting Australia's National Pathways squad.

This year Scottie's shooting calendar is full to the brim with domestic and international events which present chances to compete against the best shooters in the world and opportunities for Paralympic qualification. "Almost every month this year we've got something on," he said. "This is a crucial time for preparation and having the support of SSAA National is so important to me."

"It takes a lot of time and effort to reach the top level in shooting. You really have to live and breathe it and to know I'm showing everyone what you can achieve regardless of ability when you really commit, makes this an amazing sport to be a part of."

AUSTRALIAN Shooter

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He'll be sorely missed

I APPRECIATED YOUR tribute to Peter Bindon in the June 2022 issue. I knew Peter in Canberra Masonic circles long after I'd been reading him in *Australian Shooter* and not knowing who he was. He was literally a scholar and a gentleman who'll be sorely missed by the many communities with which he was involved.

Damian Donovan, via email

Seeing things differently

I'LL NEVER BE in Russell Mark's class as a shooter so nothing here should be taken as contradicting or questioning the advice in his column (*Shooter*, November 2022). I just thought some people might benefit from my experience. I shot a Shanghai bow with my right hand holding it and left hand and left eye doing the sighting (my right arm was stronger and so more steady) then later found my left eye is dominant and optically better.

I was a keen rifle shooter so no problem there and also fired shotgun by closing my left eye. Over time by repeatedly checking how I was seeing the target over the shotgun barrels with both eyes open I found I could bring my eye and brain to focus primarily on my right eye's sighting, something others may benefit from trying over time.

My wife had cataracts and had her lenses replaced in the standard operation and being a strong-willed person decided to have one lens set for reading and the other for long vision. It took about six months for her eyes and brain to fully accept one eye would do the short work on its own and the other the long vision work on its own. So that might be an indicator of the time it may take to have your brain accept and settle into the required pattern as you practise at home with an empty gun (if it works for you at all). I still throw the gun up a few times before I start shooting to remind my brain of what's required.

Ian Coombes, ACT

One good turn

I READ WITH interest John Dunn's article on flintlocks (*Shooter*, May 2022) and found it a great aid for beginners. To avoid flash-fizz-bang (flinch) I've always followed John's method in loading but with a couple of minor differences, the first being to use a turned brass plug for the flash hole. There are no unwanted chance sparks with brass, though a small dry stick from under the nearest tree also works if I've been forgetful.

The second difference is that while I only half fill the pan with 4F powder (unless I'm forgetful again in which case 3F seems to



work well), before firing I always turn the flintlock 90 degrees to the right so all the powder in the pan (with cover closed of course) moves furthest away from the flash hole to give a clearer path of flash to touch hole and then through. Now I don't know how much turning the flintlock helps but it sure doesn't hinder as I achieve ignition almost as fast as that with percussion. It also helps to have a good, properly hardened frizzen and sharp flint.

Peter Meyer, via email

• Many thanks for your comments Peter. I haven't heard of anyone using a brass plug in the vent but perhaps that's just my sheltered upbringing. My old man always used to tip the rifle 90 degrees to move the priming as far away from the flash hole as he could and reckoned it worked better that way. It's nice to know there are still shooters out there who care about the flintlock - John Dunn.

Insurance Q&A

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Q I'm moving my business as a firearms dealer from a commercial premises to my home property to save on rental expenses. Can I rely on my home and contents insurance as cover at home?

A This has been a hot topic in recent years as more and more people have been forced to work from home and many have created their own home-based business. First and foremost you need separate

insurance policies for your business and your home and contents. Additionally you must notify your insurer you're running a business on private property as there have been examples during the past 12 months where an insurance company has refused a home and contents claim because they weren't notified.

Home business has different potential risks which need to be covered beyond what a home and contents policy covers.

For your type of business you'll need to consider a range of cover including public and products liability, material damage, theft, property and personal accident cover. Visit ssaib.com.au or call 08 8332 0281 for more information.



Lame duck legislation an ongoing frustration

This year has been a particularly frustrating time for duck hunters in both South Australia and Victoria with SA hunters disheartened at the shortening of season length, most probably to align with Victoria's opening in the hope of reducing shooter numbers. And for no good reason, certain species were left out of the bag when their inclusion would have no negative conservation impact. As I write this, hunters in Victoria are becoming increasingly frustrated that approaching mid-February they don't know any conditions or if a season is even on the cards.

Conditions this year with regard to available habitat and breeding are exceptional. We've had three wet years in a row with the past 12 months handing down once-in-50-year flood events which should allow all hunting states to sanction full bags and full-length seasons. In times of drought we reduce bag limits so why not increase them in times of flood? With Victoria moving towards an adaptive harvest model to remove politics from the decision-making process around season settings, there will be disappointment that the current interim harvest model is expected to spit out a number well below many hunters' expectations.

It's fair to say 2023 will be the start of several years of plenty. As inland waters dry up and birds start to seek more permanent habitat, there will be a significant uplift in duck abundance throughout traditional hunting areas. I anticipate in coming years the Eastern Australia Aerial Waterbird

Survey will start to show a heck of a lot more ducks than have been reported during the past few years.

It may take one or two years of drying but you'd think abundance levels should be similar to those recorded in the 1980s when the survey was launched after a few wet years. If not then it's more a waterbird habitat issue than an abundance one and that would be related to changes in water management in survey areas across the years, not a sign that ducks are in danger of becoming extinct. They'll just be in places where the water is.

The 'antis' have certainly upped their game in a bid to attack duck hunting this year. I'm sure they also know there's a massive uplift in duck numbers coming and feel the need to spread lies now while certain data doesn't reflect the true environmental conditions. SA hunters have been granted a season by an environment minister seen as openly anti-hunting, though what she's done is announce a review into duck and quail hunting with the terms of reference aligned with animal welfare issues and not sustainability. There are major warning signs here and the state's hunting community has a fight on its hands against an orchestrated effort by animal rights and welfare organisations with the RSPCA leading the charge.

In Victoria the media has been reporting the season could be up in the air due to a change in position of the newly re-elected Government. Even though the Government's policy is to support duck hunting,



the prolonged delayed announcement of season conditions has caused quite a stir, though that's probably fuelled by the Greens and Animal Justice Party feeding the media rumours and fake news to suit and push their agendas. This has left a lot of hunters confused and angry that the season may not go ahead even though conditions are excellent.

One thing's for sure - we must not tire of the relentless attacks on our pastimes. We must fight or we'll lose. Don't be afraid to write a letter to the editor of your favourite newspaper and/or your MP to explain that hunting is part of your and your family's culture and is a healthy food-gathering exercise which delivers significant economic benefits to rural communities.

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Do it yourself and save big on shooting costs

As inflation rears its ugly head once again, we have to ask what effect it will have on those of us who use factory ammunition or reload our own cartridges. Most metal prices, due to high demand and world shortages, have risen sharply in the past couple of years and unfortunately most of the components used to manufacture ammunition are made of copper, brass or lead. Add to this the rising price of fuel which knocks on to the shipping and freight cost of everything else and we see why over-the-counter prices have increased dramatically. Just ask someone who hasn't bought a packet of ammunition or box of projectiles for a year or so.

As a result of these price increases there has been renewed interest in reloading our own ammunition, not just from beginners but from older shooters who've realised they can do more shooting for the same price by reusing their brass cartridges. This reloading cost can be further reduced by buying individual components in bulk - I'm

sure your local firearms dealer will give you a better price if you buy a carton of 1000 primers instead of a packet of 100.

Similarly, by buying in bulk the one brand and weight of your favourite projectile - say the 50gr .22 calibre if you have a .223 Remington or .22/250 Remington, and 80gr .243 calibre if you have a .243 Winchester - the savings can be considerable. If you shoot a pistol or rifle with a large calibre cartridge, then buying cast lead projectiles from the several brands available over the counter can save considerably on the cost of shooting, especially if you go through a lot of rounds each week at your local range.

An even better way is to buy a bullet mould and make your own projectiles at home. There's a large range of moulds available for the various calibres and each calibre usually has a selection of projectile weights to choose from, so you can pick which one you need for your particular shooting requirements. An added bonus to saving money is that by handloading your

own ammunition you'll learn a great deal about bullets and ballistics and be able to turn out cartridges at home which perform as well or better than factory-made ones. And there's a good deal of satisfaction to be had from landing a decent shot with ammunition you've made yourself.

Handloaders, by experimenting with new loads and converting old cartridges to new calibres, have always played an important role in the development of factory cartridges and many of those now available on dealers' shelves had their beginnings as wildcat cartridges. The .22-250 Remington for instance started life as the .250-3000 Savage, was converted to .22 calibre by J.E. Gebby and J.B. Smith in 1937 and has gone on to become arguably the most popular .22 high-powered cartridge in the world.

If you know someone who's just starting out in this great sport, a wonderful gift for him or her would be a subscription to *Australian Shooter* from which they'll gain a wealth of knowledge and a passion which could last a lifetime. Not only is the magazine full of interesting articles on hunting and competitive shooting, it also contains a wealth of information on what's available and what's new in the wide world of shooting, both in products and technology.



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Q I'm interested to hear your opinion on how much difference changing some of the dimensions of an adjustable stock can make. I was at the range recently when one of my shotgun buddies changed the height of his comb after claiming he was constantly shooting way under his targets. I swear he added no more than a one-millimetre spacer to the comb but sure enough, next time he shot he went from almost missing half to a near perfect score in a round of Trap. I've fallen into the bad habit of constantly changing the comb of my stock but it doesn't seem to do much. Any advice greatly appreciated.

Al McDermott, SA

A Let me start by saying I'm certainly an advocate of the adjustable comb on any shotgun as the positives far outweigh the negatives, but only if you're brave enough to not blame the gun when you miss. It sounds easy but virtually impossible for some shooters to do (I'll come back to this).

If your friend was indeed constantly shooting under his targets he may certainly need a higher comb on the stock and lifting it by any amount will help. Raising it 1mm will alter his point of impact by just under four per cent so if he was shooting a pattern which impacted 60 per cent of shot above its point of aim, that extra millimetre will raise this to just on 64 per cent. If you look at this in terms of actual measurements then if point of impact initially was 10cm high at 30m, the extra millimetre raised its impact point to just on 10.4cm at the same

distance. Either way four per cent of 40mm isn't much.

Do I believe a small alteration like this would change your friend's gun from shooting half to near-perfect rounds? No chance. Not physically but mentally it must've made a significant difference and this is the real trap of adjustable combs - or the real benefit depending on how you look at it. I urge everyone to use a pattern board when making any stock changes as even identifying a four per cent variation in the pattern's point of impact is very hard to do. I try to make changes of no less than 2mm and preferably 3mm at a time, as lowering or raising shotgun combs for this very reason is mainly to try and distinguish between physical improvements or mental ones. But therein lies the problem.

If raising your friend's comb by just 1mm turns his score from say 13/25 to 24/25 then there's an argument that 1mm is all the adjustment the stock needed. If all it's really doing is helping his frame of mind and confidence - and by association improving his mental approach which in turn makes him swing the gun smoother to the targets and help his scores - then how can you argue this small adjustment is incorrect?

You'll eventually hear the term 'new gun syndrome' being used around the range. This phenomenon happens when someone uses a new shotgun for the first time and shoots near perfect scores with it. The gun may not fit the shooter but they never seem to miss with it and this happens because for a brief period the shooter just sees the target and shoots it, though sooner or later

doubt creeps in and they second-guess themselves and the syndrome fizzles out.

Before long they have an adjustable comb cut into the stock, they're changing ammunition, recoil pads, front sights and every other possible alternative until the gun is put on the market so they can start the cycle all over again. What your friend's probably experiencing is a mild form of this syndrome so give him time and he'll be adding a few more millimetres to the comb.

The problem you mention that's hurting your game is every time you shoot a bad round you feel the need to make these minor changes to the stock which are not physically making much difference to where your gun's actually shooting. Because of this you're not helping your confidence and ultimately not improving. My advice is to start a shooting diary, record your changes and determine what works for you and what doesn't otherwise you may very well be chasing your tail for years.



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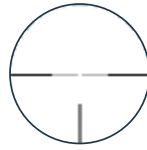


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Q I have some cartridge brass I'd like refurbished to give it the same finish as military-issued brass. All the usual methods I've tried just produce a nice shiny case but they're not issued like that. How do I do it?

Trevor Connell, via email



A The best method I've found is to place the brass in a plastic container with a sealable lid, pour three-quarters of a cup of hot water, a quarter cup of white vinegar and a generous squirt of dishwashing liquid into the container then seal. Shake the container for about a minute then sit it in the sun for a few minutes. Shake the container again for about 30 seconds and let it sit, repeating this a few of times before straining out the mixture and running cold water over the brass for a couple of minutes to remove all residue. Place a dry towel in the sun and spread the brass out to dry.

Barry Wilmot

Q I'd like to share what I think is an interesting item - a Darne shotgun. If you could shed some light on its age, history and a rough estimate of its value it would be great to know more about it. An Italian gent bought it new in Italy in the early 1970s then migrated to Australia around the end of that decade. It has seen

very little use, indeed I'm only the gun's second owner and in the six years I've had it there have only been four rounds put through it. It's such a beautiful item almost too good to use and is in as-new condition with no marks or scratches anywhere, the blueing is unmarked and the barrel interiors are spotless. I'd appreciate any information you can give me.

Frank Odorico, via email

A Regis Darne was a French gunmaker based in St Etienne. His unique sliding breech system for operating the double-barrelled gun was invented in 1897 and a nice history of the company was written by Steve Bodio in *Sporting Classics Daily*. Several writers give a large amount of conflicting information about the various models of this unusual gun. From the pictures your gun with its 7Q-475 serial number is likely to have been made between 1974-78 and the proof marks suggest it's a 'middle' grade gun. The 1967 *Shooters' Bible* shows a picture of an almost identical model to yours (named the Pheasant Hunter Deluxe) which sold then for \$US279.50. Even US valuers are reluctant to put a price on it as so few of these beautiful, highly variable and unique firearms come up for sale.

Geoff Smith



Q A fellow I work with is selling a Marlin lever action rifle in .45-70 which I'm interested in buying. I like lever action rifles and while I haven't shot the .45-70 I'd like to give it a try. Consequently I'm looking for some advice on whether or not it would be a suitable hunting rifle for pigs, goats and perhaps deer. If possible I'd also like a little bit of history on the cartridge and if I can reload for it.

Kevin Pearce, NSW

A The .45-70 cartridge was introduced for the US military in 1873 for the Springfield Trapdoor rifle and remained the service cartridge for almost two decades until it was replaced by the .30-40 Krag in 1892. It's still around in repeating rifles like the Marlin and in modern single-shots by Ruger and Winchester as well as reproduction rifles such as the Pedersoli rolling blocks.

Most factory-loaded ammunition available doesn't do the cartridge justice in terms of the ballistics it's capable of developing, simply because there are still old rifles in use out there which might blow up with anything more than basic loads. Over the years I've either owned or reviewed a dozen or so rifles in the calibre and all seemed to shoot reasonably well with factory ammunition and better with handloads (most loading manuals list suitable loads).

Factory ammo is formidable on pigs, goats and smaller deer such as fallow provided the ranges aren't too long and the big flat-nosed bullets have a large frontal area which delivers high energy levels even buffalo find hard to ignore. With handloaded ammo I've taken fallow and sambar deer, buffalo and scrub cattle without any problems at ranges of around 140m though I prefer to be closer if possible. It's not your typical modern flat-shooting magnum but does have its place in the hands of a careful hunter prepared to take his game at shorter ranges. It's a fun calibre to shoot and the experience won't do you any harm.

John Dunn



Q I'm trying different projectiles, different seating depths, powder weights etc and my question is: Should I clean the barrel after each different round, every 10 rounds or at the end of the day? I do need some clarity on this as everyone has their own methods and advice so your thoughts on the matter would be much appreciated.

Jeff Kinnear, via email

A Well Jeff, I don't know about clarity so what I'm going to do is add one more method to the mix as you know the old story about ask 100 shooters the same question and you'll get 100 different answers. When I fire load development rounds at targets and/or over the chronograph I normally start with a barrel that was cleaned after its last outing. If shooting five-shot groups I load six rounds of each sample and waste the first shot into the stop butt to foul the barrel then record the results of the next five.

When changing to the next test load I do the same thing and have six loads, waste the first and record the other five though I will clean the barrel when changing from one bullet material to another, from lead to jacketed or vice-versa for example, and continue the same routine of fouling the barrel with the first shot. Having said that, if the barrel needs cleaning I will clean it.

As a general rule however, I clean the barrel at the same interval I usually would under normal circumstances for a particular firearm depending on its use. For example I'd clean a precision, long-range tack-hole rifle at the same interval while firing test loads as I normally would at the range during a match, whereas a hunting rifle will just receive a good clean at the end of the day regardless of the number of rounds fired. So Jeff, if you routinely clean after one, 10, 20 or 100 shots, stick to that frequency while developing your loads as well.

Rod Pascoe

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

Mitchell, WA

A For any given load fired in a rifle or shotgun you'll experience a certain amount of recoil, some call it 'felt' recoil and others 'measured' or recoil energy and depending on the potency of the shotgun gauge and load or rifle cartridge this can become quite extreme. Magnum shotshell loads in 12-gauge produce recoil at a level beyond the average shooter's tolerance after many rounds fired as do bigger centerfire rifle cartridges from about the 30-06 Springfield upwards.

There are various ways of lessening this effect and you'll win those beers by telling your mates that increasing the weight of a firearm reduces recoil for the same load.

This being so, you'll actually increase recoil by reducing the weight of the firearm and this is true for both rifles and shotguns.

Ways to cut the kickback for any given load include muzzle brakes and barrel porting on rifles and increasing a shotgun barrel's internal bore size within legal limits and removing the forcing cones which reduces pressure slightly and augments the other modifications mentioned. The addition of a quality Sorbothane-style recoil pad for both rifles and shotguns certainly helps too.

There's a practical limit to how heavy a firearm can be especially if you're carrying it on hunting trips. We see ads for mountain rifles weighing about 6.5lb including a quality lightweight scope in serious compact cartridges like the .308 Win. This is an amazingly versatile round but in a lightweight rifle like that you'll know all about it when you pull the trigger, while in a rifle a couple of pounds heavier the same load will seem so much milder in felt recoil and that's simply down to increased weight.

Paul Miller



Great Australian bite!



Daniel O'Dea gets his teeth into new all-Aussie Taipan Light



A few years back I was at Southern Cross Small Arms (SCSA) in New South Wales doing some background on their TSP X chassis system which I had for review. Speaking with director Damir Lukic and having been sworn to secrecy, he revealed to me an early prototype of a new firearm design he was working on and his plan was pretty simple: To design and manufacture an affordable Australian-abuilt modern pump-action centrefire rifle.

The project I felt was quite ambitious. Not that I doubted the design would work, rather the combination of manufacturing costs together with the economies of scale required to produce such a rifle at a price the market could support in volume seemed perhaps unachievable. Then there were the hazards of navigating state-by-state regulatory requirements on what at times seem to

be completely subjective interpretations of firearms laws.

Yet Damir was undeterred and, buoyed by the success of both the APC and TSP X chassis systems which enjoyed international success through the distributorship of Legacy Sports in the US and subsidiary Outdoor Sporting Agencies locally, was confident he could make it work. By early 2022 he'd made some working samples, one of which he gave me for testing and feedback. As with any new design there were a few minor kinks to iron out and improve but by the end of last year SCSA proudly released a finished product in the Taipan Light.


Just prior to Christmas I visited their newly-expanded manufacturing facility in southwestern Sydney. Brimming with the latest hi-tech CNC equipment it was gratifying to see the hard work Damir and

his guys had put in was finally paying off, as I witnessed racks of Taipan rifles being packed and loaded for delivery by the OSA rep. The Taipan had been well anticipated by the market and pre-sales were strong. I was also there to pick up a rifle, handing back the prototype for a newly-finished production sample for this review.

In essence the Taipan Light is a pump-action rifle built around a machined alloy chassis. Mechanically you have a rectangular bolt carrier containing a rotating multi-lugged bolt held in place with a cam pin, the bolt carrier actuated manually via a connecting bar to a polymer pump grip integrated into the fore-end. The bolt head mates with a proprietary barrel extension that headspaces to the barrel.

From the fired position, when the action is cycled rearwards (slide pumped) the connecting bar moves the bolt carrier backwards causing the cam pin to rotate the bolt out of the battery and extract and eject the spent case. At the same time the bolt carrier rides over a hammer which is caught by a sear and held in position. On the forward stroke a new round is stripped for the magazine and chambered, with the bolt back into position to lock the chambered round in the battery. When the trigger is pulled the hammer sear releases and the hammer falls, striking the rear of the firing pin which is a container within the bolt assembly. The round fires and the cycle is complete.

The basis of the bolt/carrier system is somewhat similar to other straight pull and gas-operated designs though I must stress that in this case it's completely manual - the Taipan Light by design is a Category 'B' rifle and never can or will be anything but. Ergonomically, styling is akin to other modern sporting rifle designs which means alloy construction, pistol grip, forward



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All-Aussie Taipan Light

magazine housing and so on. The heritage of SCSA earlier bolt-action chassis designs is evident in the stock as well as some other features such as integrated QD sling cups.

Up close

For a more detailed look we'll start at the muzzle where there's a Lothar Walther 16.5" (420mm) stainless steel button-rifled barrel of 16.5mm diameter with a 1-in-8 twist, the muzzle threaded 1/2-28 TPI to accept muzzle devices or suppressors where permitted with a neatly knurled stainless steel thread protector provided as standard. The rifle is chambered in .223 Wylde which means it'll accept both .223 Remington and 5.56 NATO ammunition.

Surrounding the barrel, the octagon-shaped alloy fore-end provides for a continuous full-length Picatinny rail from the muzzle straight back across the upper receiver, a tad over 565mm of rail space for optics. There are six M-Lok slots at the front of the fore-end (two each left, right and bottom edge) for accessory fitment of bipods, sling cups, torches etc. while the fore-end also supports the pump slide assembly presented by its injection-molded polymer grips.

The body or chassis effectively consists of four main components - fore-end, upper and lower receivers and stock - all bolted together with a series of Hex keys and mated with precision, presenting visible seams but no gaps. Although the receiver is two-part (upper and lower) these components aren't hinged and are intended to



remain assembled, so while not overly complicated to take apart it's not designed to be broken down for cleaning and the manual doesn't support operator disassembly. However, in the interest of science I did take the review gun apart for photos.

The upper receiver serves to support the fore-end, barrel assembly (barrel and extension) and houses the bolt and carrier group. The lower receiver concentrates on the stock and pistol grip, houses the trigger assembly and provides the magazine housing which is integrated into the receiver. This also involves the main fire controls which are trigger, safety and magazine release.

The alloy stock is straight off SCSA's TSP X rifle chassis and features an adjustable cheekpiece as well as provision to adjust length of pull by adding or removing a collection of provided polymer spacers, the rear of the stock finished with a thick



rubber kick pad. Worth noting is the provision of four QD sling swivel positions on the stock, left and right, just forward of the toe and two left and right where the stock mates with the receiver, though technically these last two are machined into the lower receiver tang. There's no front sling point as standard but with so much 'rail-estate' as well as six M-Lok slots out front, options for a front sling point are endless.

Although a completely different rifle by both actuation and design and sharing no mechanical componentry, the firearm's ergonomics are similar to both AR and other MSR (Modern Sporting Rifle) designs with regard to layout and relationship of the fire controls. The position of the safety lever, trigger and magazine release will be familiar to anyone with knowledge of such rifles.

But ergonomics is where it ends and apart from using a standard STANAG-pattern magazine and A2-style pistol grip which are rather ubiquitous to many types these days, the rifle has absolutely nothing in common with any military-style firearm. It was specifically designed and built with this in mind as to not run foul of any 'appearance-type' firearm regulations and as a result has been approved for sale even in NSW and WA along with all other mainland states.



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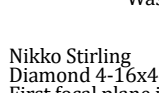
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All-Aussie Taipan Light



Daniel lines up with the SCSA Taipan Light.

The rifle comes with two 10-round polymer Magpul Pmags which are push to lock and drop free on release, the magazine release perfectly positioned for operation with your extended trigger finger (right-handed operation). A small mag stop prevents over insertion and the manual instructs mags not be 'slammed' into the gun to prevent damage, so any potential tactical operators would be best advised not to get carried away. The two-position safety lever is left of the receiver to be easily operated with the thumb, clear 'Safe' and 'Fire' markings visible on both sides. I know early Taipan samples had ambidextrous safety levers so there could be future provision here for lefties.

Other controls include a bolt release on the right of the receiver. The receiver locks-in a battery when a round is chambered to prevent out of battery discharge, the bolt release literally releasing the bolt to allow the chamber to be cleared without firing. Finally, there's a bolt lock which presents as a cross bolt-type safety at the top rear edge of the receiver, its purpose to lock the bolt open. The theory is if the bolt is left open with a loaded magazine inserted, use of this bolt lock can prevent accidental chambering of a round by inertia if the rifle is bumped.

The trigger is blade-style with a flat face, factory set at 3½-4½lb and completely non-adjustable. Such trigger assemblies with a sear-engaged hammer aren't generally conducive to tinkering or improvement and by design are heavy for safety reasons, in fact the manual references anti-tamper

material on the set screw and that no adjustment is available in the design. I'm not unfamiliar with this type of trigger arrangement so wasn't surprised to find it heavy, creepy and generally unredeemable. To be blunt, out of the box it's pretty terrible but not unexpected in this type of trigger.

While I had the gun apart, without getting carried away I lubed the sear surfaces and, with my thumb on the hammer, tripped and reset the trigger a couple of hundred times to help bed and smooth out the surfaces before removing excess lube for reassembly. This seemed to work as afterwards the trigger pull was almost bearable and averaged 4.2lb on my Lyman electronic gauge. On the plus side the trigger's a drop-in unit and Damir tells me there are aftermarket suppliers (trigger specialists) working on possible upgrade options for the future.

For the launch OSA packaged some Taipan Lights with 3-9x40 Crimson Trace Hardline riflescopes and Nikko Stirling ring mounts to suit. Basically the optic is a 3-9 variable with a .223/5.56 drop compensating reticle which makes it a suitable option. On the range, accuracy was highly acceptable for this style of firearm and was also consistent with groups falling around the 1½ MOA mark with pretty much every ammo shot. As with similar designs, action lock-up and rigidity is never going to match that of a bolt-action rifle, likewise with a hammer activated firing system the trigger lock time will always be greater, so the system is less conducive to accuracy.



The rifle comes with two 10-round polymer Magpul Pmags.

All things considered accuracy was quite good and you won't miss much in the field shooting 1½" groups. The reality is with this type of firearm any trade-off in accuracy is compensated by ergonomics and handling and to that degree the Taipan is compact, light and fast to point, shoot and reload.

In running the Taipan there are a few other things to consider. I've used several pump-actions over the years, mainly shotguns both as a Category 'C' licence holder and pre-1996 gun owner when most of us had a 'pumpy'. The key to running a pump-action well is to go hard and fast - don't pussyfoot around - and the Taipan's no different. Such guns don't have much in the way of primary extraction. In a bolt gun the initial coming of the bolt helps break that contact between case and chamber after firing though this is all but missing in such a design so when cases become sticky you're

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All-Aussie Taipan Light

relying on brute force to cycle the action. For the same reason I'd avoid factory ammo with soft brass and generally forget reloads. Most manufacturers don't recommend the use of handloaded ammunition in their firearms and SCSA are no different, though if you're determined to reload for the Taipan I suggest you full-length resize all brass and run it through a factory crimp die. Furthermore, find yourself a .223 chamber checker/cartridge gauge and if your reloaded ammo drops in and out of such a gauge without sticking you might have a chance. I ran my own reloads in the test gun and had a few issues chambering some but thankfully no extraction problems. Even with factory ammo you should find something that functions well but run a few packs before you buy in bulk. I tried several brands including Winchester, Hornady, Australian Outback and even some steel-cased Wolf ammo without a hitch.

The chamber is cut as .223 Wylde which allows greater flexibility of ammunition. Many think both .223 Remington and 5.56 NATO ammo is basically the same round and completely interchangeable but the fact is NATO chambers are cut to slightly increased dimensions than commercial .223 Remington to allow for longer military projectiles and higher pressures to which 5.56 NATO rounds are loaded.

It's safe to use .223 Remington in a 5.56 chamber but not the other way round as pressures can potentially spike dangerously when a 5.56 round is fired in a .223 Remington chamber. Likewise the 5.56 chamber with its longer throat is less likely to produce best accuracy with a shorter projectile. The .223 Wylde chambering is a compromise between the two dimensionally, safe to fire 5.56 NATO with acceptable accuracy still from shorter lighter projects so it's the best of both worlds.

In use I'd note the rifle locks open on an empty magazine which can be a handy



Accuracy was pretty consistent around the 1 1/2 MOA mark, plenty for hunting and more than acceptable for this style of rifle.

feature if you lose count when firing rapidly, as you'll know when it's time to change the mag before dropping the hammer on an empty chamber. However, this does also mean the magazine needs to be dropped or removed before the action can be cycled closed on an empty chamber. I discovered the hold open on empty though this is a complete function of the magazine follow design on Pmags which have a square edge at the back of the magazine follower. I tried other compatible magazines and found the bolt would happily ride over some other type followers, so there are options available should you not want this feature.

In summary

The SCSA Taipan Light seems to have met the original brief, including affordability. Target pricing was pitched around the \$2000 mark which is pretty much where it's been from launch, considering package

pricing. With any new project there can be teething problems but based on my experience with both pre-production and current series rifles it appears any glitches have been well and truly ironed out.

I found SCSA to be both proactive and solution-based with ongoing development. I noticed some early wear on the Cerakote finish around the bolt latch on the new rifle, though on mentioning it discovered SCSA are already on it and have outlaid further investment in new Cerakote spray booths. It's always encouraging to see new Aussie-made products in our industry and the Taipan Light is a unique rifle, especially at the price. If early demand is any indication it should prove extremely popular with Aussie shooters. ●

Specifications:

Rifle: SCSA Taipan Light
Action: Pump
Trigger: Single-stage
Calibre: .223 Wylde
Capacity: 10-round detachable magazine
Barrel: 16.5" (420mm) button rifled
Twist rate: 1-in-8
Weight: 2.95kg
Muzzle: Threaded 1/2 x 28
Sights: 565mm Picatinny rail for optic mounting
Stock: Alloy (TSP X)
Overall length: 890mm
Length of pull: 305mm
Distributor: Outdoor Sporting Agencies
RRP: \$2250 (estimated package price at launch)



The Taipan Light broken down to its base assemblies. Upper and lower receivers, fore-end and stock.



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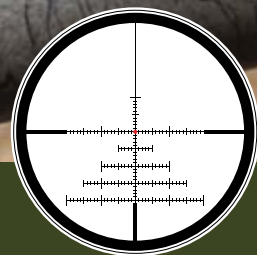
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This is the second in a series on *The Hunter's Mancave* in which some of our regular contributors look back fondly on treasured mementoes

Happy days

Thomas Tabor recalls the thrill of the hunt

A trophy room, sometimes called a mancave, means different things to different people but to me the walls of my trophy room represent a working canvas portraying the best of my life. There you'll find a depiction of great times, frequently trying times, accomplishments and sometimes when things didn't go as I'd expected.

In essence each of the items found there comes with its own story and when viewed as a whole it portrays who I am as a hunter as well as a person and while some of my taxidermy mounts would surely

be considered true trophies in the most common sense of the word, the majority are more typical of the species. A true trophy in my eyes is one that comes with an interesting tale and isn't necessarily judged solely on length of horn or tusk. When my eyes settle on the shoulder of a Northern Territory buffalo hanging over our TV with horns just a tad under a score of 100, it conjures up the sweltering heat we endured during that hunt and how hard I'd worked to take such a bull.

When I turn my attention to the full-body mountain goat now perched on its simulated

rock outcropping, I can't help but recall having to pack the entire camp myself deep in the back country of the US Cascades mountain range. I'll never forget the devastation which ensued after that shot as the billy came tumbling off his high cliff abode bringing with it a massive spill of boulders as the goat propelled off a rock pinnacle with all four legs sticking straight up.

When my taxidermist looked at the flesh side of the hide he jokingly told me it looked like I'd beaten the goat to death with a stick rather than shot it. Fortunately the outer hide came through the fall

When Thomas built his family home the trophy room was an important inclusion.





This mountain goat is one of Thomas' prized trophies but also one of his most difficult hunts.

surprisingly well though one horn tip was sacrificed which the taxidermist was able to repair. While that hunt was a successful one resulting in a good old billy, I'm glad it took place in my younger days as now I'm not sure my ageing bones could survive such an experience. Once back home I told my daughters to take a picture of my bruised and battered condition and show me that snap if I ever contemplated another goat hunt.

When I look at possibly my most enduring trophy, that of my bighorn ram, I remember how I had to apply for 35



It took 35 years of applying for this limited quota licence hunt before Thomas was able to hunt his bighorn sheep.

consecutive years in order to draw that limited quota licence. On that occasion only a single licence was issued in that particular hunting district and it was mine, fulfilling a long-held dream many other hunters will never be lucky enough to enjoy and I feel fortunate to have been given the opportunity.

If I step around the New Brunswick black bear hide on the floor of my trophy room I can't help but recall how I thought the black flies were literally going to eat me alive and how I mistakenly passed on a shot at a much larger bear because I waited

too long to take aim. That bear then circled downwind of my location, emitted a couple of loud snorts and was never seen again and while I eventually took my bear, I'll always recollect that much larger bruin and how crafty it was.

And my African red hartebeest with a wire poacher snare wrapped around the base of one of its horns is a story just waiting to be told. We only learned of the snare as we approached the downed bull whereupon my accompanying professional hunter quickly began to remove it until I stepped in and, after snapping a few photos,



Hunter's mancave

asked him to leave it attached for the time being. Obviously the snare had to be removed before caping and tanning could take place but after mounting I returned it to the base of the horn just as we found it.

Even though I've never considered myself a lucky person, some of the hunts depicted on the walls of my mancave came with a certain amount of good fortune attached while others involved a great deal of sweat, strained muscles and in a few cases the shedding of a little of my own blood. But during all those decades of hunting I've absolutely no regrets as no matter how those hunts took place or how difficult they were, every mount, horn, pig tusk, hide and memory in that room has a story waiting to be told.

To the non-hunter it might be hard to appreciate why we choose to display our trophies in this manner, indeed some may even say it amounts to a type of bragging about your exploits yet in reality that's far from the truth. To me it's a way of rekindling some of the greatest adventures and memories of my life, often involving old mates and new mates coming together for the best of times.

Not everything's wall-bound

To have trophies professionally mounted by a taxidermist can be a costly affair but many of my exhibits I produced myself as horn, skull, tusk mounts and displays are all possible and often involve only a small if any outlay of actual dollars. Over the years I've used various types of antlers and horns to make knife and tool handles and have used those same materials for pistol grip and forearm caps for my rifles. While these things may not have quite the awe-inspiring impact of an expensive full-body mount, they're still a great way to remember an adventure.

Even the little 10cm African grey duiker horn now residing on one of my trophy



The problematic warthog tusk now sits beside various other African artefacts and keepsakes.



This trophy buffalo from the Northern Territory scored just under 100 points.

room tables comes with a story. While stalking a mountain reedbeek I came across a duiker which had fallen victim to a poacher's snare and long since been abandoned and left to rot in the African sun. In the middle of the stalk I had little time to devote to the cause but pulled one horn free and stuck it in my pocket. That little horn now lives in my trophy room alongside some huge African porcupine quills I also found, a couple of ostrich eggs and a gnarly old warthog tusk.

That warthog tusk also has a story and not a pleasant one either. While on safari we came across a long-dead warthog with only one tusk remaining and never having been able to unearth such a find, I snatched the tusk thinking I'd bring it home to make ivory knife handles from it. In order to avoid problems bringing it back in my luggage it was decided the taxidermist would include it in my trophy shipment yet months later, having not received notification of the shipment status, I learned the local inspectors had placed a hold on it and had been threatening for some time to ship it back to Africa.

Apparently they believed that perfectly clean, boiled and chemically treated tusk had 'possibly' contaminated my entire shipment of hides and horns and I was told before I could take possession of the shipment, all contents would have to be re-treated by one of their certified taxidermists. Timing was of the essence before the shipment found its way back to Africa but I made their arbitrarily-set deadline and picked up the crate. After all that turmoil

and expense I couldn't bring myself to cut the tusk up and now it sits on the table awaiting its agonising tale to be told to anyone who'll listen.

The way I see it

I have acquaintances with trophy rooms which put mine to shame and in one instance the guy built an entire addition to his home that's more than 370sq/m. A spiral staircase encircles a full-body giraffe which had to be mounted in place and ironically I was there when two taxidermists were working on it, one of them standing beneath the huge animal in order to sew up its belly hide.

That same trophy room has an elephant shoulder mount on the wall, all inclusive of motorised ears which slowly wave back and forth to piped-in elephant bugling sounds! Full-body African lions, kudus, grizzlies, elks, American mountain lions along with almost every other trophy animal you could imagine are on full display but is that too much of a good thing? It's hard to say but I always enjoy a walk through to hear the stories attached to those mounts. I believe most hunters like to be reminded of the experiences they've shared and a trophy room is a great way to do that, even if you don't go all-out like the guy mentioned. My trophy room is where the family and I spend most of our time and is a great way to relive the enjoyment and excitement of those days afield from the comfort of my armchair. ●



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Stock options

In last month's issue we began the process of demystifying rifle and shotgun stocks with a focus on the history, design and development of the buttstock including the butt, comb and grip. This month Mark van den Boogaart moves to the fore-end and looks at the materials used in today's modern sporting rifles and shotguns.



A Henry 1860 (Uberti reproduction) and Winchester 1866 Yellowboy.

The fore-end

So let's jump to the fore-end. Even the word itself is open to interpretation being forend, fore end or fore-end and I've gone with the latter. It's primarily designed so that (1) the shooter can hold, grip, control, aim or otherwise support the longarm as well as sometimes operating its loading mechanism or (2) not really touch it at all as the fore-end is designed to rest on a stable platform. Of course not all sporting longarms have fore-ends, for instance the Henry repeating rifle of 1860 didn't have one which gave Winchester the opportunity in 1866 to release the Yellowboy which made use of a dedicated fore-end.

Generally a fore-end designed to be supported by hand is slightly curved and not too wide to reflect the width of a shooter's hand, a notable exception to that rule being the vertical pistol grip fore-end. It may also act as part of the loading mechanism as in a pump-action rifle or shotgun in which case they tend to be smaller, rounder and more compact to afford the shooter a grip when operating the action. Conversely, fore-ends designed to be placed or rested on a stand are usually flatter on the bottom and wider, again on the bottom edge. As with buttstock design it's all about

application as in hunting v target, supported v offhand or set position v on the move.

Finally, its design also reflects the mechanics of the longarm. A side-by-side shotgun tends to have a wider fore-end to accommodate the width of two barrels, over-and-under shotguns have deep fore-ends housing two stacked barrels, while on lever-actions they tend to be oval as they wrap around the tubular magazine. Bolt-action rifles can have very fine fore-ends to accommodate a partly recessed floating barrel.



The curved, rounded fore-end of Mark's Ruger Scout rifle.

Design and you

As mentioned, the stock on that new rifle you've been eyeing up is going to reflect the design interpretations (or trends of the time) as well as its intended use and application, so in considering your purchase ask yourself are you intending to target shoot or hunt?* Will you be shooting from a set, supported and static position or shooting on the move, often offhand or at best leaning against a tree or over a rock.

* The exception to this rule is varminting which combines many aspects of hunting and target shooting in the same discipline.

Material maketh the stock

Now let's look at stock construction and materials and if we again try to establish some fundamentals, in the material department it comes down to wood or something else.

Timber

Wood or timber as my brother the carpenter would insist, is probably where this all began. Now the thing is timber ain't just timber and in many cases the variations within what exactly is a 'wooden stock' are as diverse as the interpretations of what exactly is wood and how the stock is made.

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Stock options

For instance it may mean a handcrafted and hand-finished work of art fashioned from a single piece of aged timber chosen for its history, age, origin and even specifics of the parent tree from which it was milled.

It could also mean made from laminated timber, formed through the technique of bonding wood under pressure then machine cutting to an existing pattern or even made from manufactured wood, a process of creating a timber block by compressing, under enormous pressure and heat, small pieces of wood particles which are then laser cut and machine finished.

There's no doubt of the inherent beauty (to some) of a timber stock though they do have their limitations. Scratches, dents, dings and the effects of extremes in temperature can adversely affect timber stocks, yet don't underestimate a quality timber one just because it's 'pretty'. Ships aren't built for harbours and handmade timber-stocked rifles aren't meant for the gun safe.

Man-made

Away from timber we enter the world of manufactured materials where plastic and its composites, fibreglass, carbon-fibre, combined fibre composites, metal alloys and even a combination of all the above can be found in stock manufacture.

While an artisan stock-builder can make you just about anything, the benefits of industrialised manufacturing and modern materials are considerable. From the ability to be shaped into almost limitless designs via moulding and machining, incorporating components and the easy interchangeability of these along with durability, all mean manufactured stocks take their rightful place alongside more traditional designs in the world of modern sporting arms.

A finely cut and finished timber stock circa 1820.



The magic of composite materials and industrialised manufacture.

Beware the dollar trap

Don't let the fact these stocks use manufactured materials fool you on cost as you can buy a cheap 'plastic' stock, a very expensive one made from cutting-edge carbon-fibre composites or a rifle chassis milled from a single piece of high-grade alloy. Conversely cost doesn't always transfer into performance and it's important to know what it is you're buying before you cough up the cash, as was explained to me in 2017.

It was a miserable winter's day in England and I was doing something I enjoy whenever I travel - visiting gunshops. In Mayfair, a suburb within the City of London, you'll find all sorts of interesting things including Holland & Holland and Purdey along with smaller bespoke gunrooms and, just so you know, they're way friendlier than the big names. So I wandered into a smaller one to look over their display and

soon enough the head gunsmith appeared and we started talking before he showed me and let me shoulder a newly-built modern hunting rifle with a £500,000 price tag (about \$890,000!)

In a word it was horrible, befitted with gold and precious stone inlays and it was like aiming an office chair. Seeing the look on my face he admitted it was a terrible rifle, would never be used for hunting and was built to a price for a client who bought them by the dozen. They were essentially gifts and would eventually hang on walls in hunting rooms filled with shop-bought taxidermy in faraway lands. As a rifle it had everything - all of which worked against it - totally ineffective yet truly impressive as a gift for its intended recipient.



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Stock options



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R8 BIG GAME RIFLES

Horses for courses

In my gun safe is a fine example of a classically finished timber hunting rifle alongside a very modern Cerakoted version, a classic lever-action, browned barrelled English side-by-side, carbon-fibre finished air rifle, a rough-and-ready laminated Scout rifle and I recently added a Sako 85 Hunter in

blued timber. The point is, to the best of my ability they're fit for purpose, I like them all, I like their looks, how they perform, they're all left-handed and apart from the lever-action .22LR they fit me. The downside is it took me a long time to get there. So my advice is don't be dazzled by the specs, the sales pitch, amazing technology

and materials. Pick equipment based on your intended use and personal physical attributes and if you do you'll be well on the way to making wise decisions and using gear that delivers for you when you need it to deliver. ●

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**X-Bolt Hell's Canyon
Max Long Range**

RRP **\$2,495.00**

Calibres:
300PRC, 300RUM, 300WM, 6.8WST



Weight off my mind

Con Kapralos applauds as M1500 breaks the 3kg barrier

The Highland Sports' (now Outdoor Sporting Agencies) "Howa - Dream It - Build It" campaign of more than a decade ago refreshed the profile of the M1500 rifle made by Howa Manufacturing of Japan to Australian shooters. The Howa platform was already known here in the shape of the early CMC Mountaineer and later the M1500 range, but with the new marketing strategy the consumer could choose from an array of Howa barrelled actions and mate them to a stock of their choice.

While stock options were initially quite limited, current choices available are many from the standard Hogue OverMoulded unit, alternatives from Boyds and HS Precision to some fine chassis-style stocks from Southern Cross Small Arms and Oryx. Though the Howa M1500 is an excellent platform as a barrelled action, avid stalking hunters who prefer lightweight rifles are left wanting. The weight of current stock options means once a suitable optic is mounted to a Howa M1500 Sporter, the weight of the scoped rifle will approach or exceed 4kg and for hunters who do the hard yards on foot or backpack hunt, every gram saved seems like kilograms. I can vouch for

this as I built a fine Howa M1500 Sporter in .30-06 with the factory fluted barrel cradled in an HS Precision stock topped with a 2.5-10x50 scope. It's a superb hunting combination at just over 4.3kg but after a morning's stalk and 5-8km under foot, it certainly felt a lot heavier.

Outdoor Sporting Agencies (OSA) heeded the call for a lightweight version with the Carbon Stalker being the result and the rifle in short and long-action calibres would pitch the much-heralded M1500 barrelled action Sporter back into serious stalking rifle consideration. OSA sent for review the Howa Carbon Stalker in .308 Winchester, a blued barrelled Sporter action mated to the carbon-fibre stock made by Stocky's Stocks in the US, the rifle supplied with a new Zeiss V8 scope in 1.8-14x50 along with a selection of hunting ammunition from PPU and Hornady.

At a glance

The review rifle comes as two component forms, a blued Howa M1500 Sporter barrelled action in .308 Winchester and the carbon-fibre stock, assembly done with care. The rifle immediately impressed with a carbon-fibre weave pattern on the stock

making the whole firearm stand out with its blued barrelled action and on the scales it came in at 2.83kg. OSA did stipulate all future carbon-fibre stocks would be a slightly different pattern to the carbon weave on the prototype but the weight would be the same.

Barrelled action

This is a modern-day classic modelled on the Dickson-Golden Bear barrelled action which gave Howa its international presence. The receiver is milled from a single piece of cylindrical bar-stock and maintains that profile except for the top of the rear receiver ring and underside of the receiver frame where it beds on to the stock with a flat surface warranted. Top of the receiver is drilled and tapped to accept Remington 700-style scope mounting hardware so installing a scope is a breeze.

The generous ejection port makes loading rounds into the internal box magazine easy and discharge of cases through the port is always positive and unhindered, the front receiver ring having one gas port on the left which helps dissipate hot gases from the cartridge ignition. The left of the receiver body has the model engraved



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FEATURES

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- Standard trigger
- Cold hammer forged barrel, standard rifling
- 3 shots removable polymer magazine
- Two positions safety, with bolt stop
- Polymer stock

24 INCH BARREL



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CALIBRES

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

FEATURES

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



M1500 breaks the 3kg barrier



Howa M1500 Carbon Stalker with prototype carbon-fibre stock.

into its surface as well as the name of the US importer in Legacy Sports, part of the Fuller Global Consortium which also owns OSA. A small tab on the rear left flank serves as the bolt release button, quite unobtrusive but fits its purpose well. The right flank of the receiver only carries the serial number on the front ring with the receiver finished in matte black which extends to the barrel.

The stock is anchored to the receiver using two hex-head bolts, one just rear of the trigger group and the other which anchors into the front recoil lug, an integral part of the receiver unit. While many modern rifles use other recoil lug designs the Howa M1500 with recoil lug milled as part of the receiver is one of the best and lends itself well to glass bedding for the utmost in accuracy.

The barrel is a standard Howa M1500 Sporter weight number two contour measuring 560mm (22") and made from chrome moly steel using the cold hammer forging method. The barrelled action is devoid of muzzle threading though I'm sure the M1500 does incorporate a threaded muzzle for accessory use in many of its barrels. The barrel is fitted to the receiver



Left side of the receiver with a small gas port on the front receiver ring.

in the old-fashioned way via a threaded barrel shank which screws into the front receiver ring and in the review calibre of .308 Winchester, a one-in-10" twist rate will handle all common .30-calibre projectile weights from 130 to 200 grains without a problem.

Bolt, safety, trigger unit

The bolt is made from a single piece of steel

inclusive of the bolt head, body and handle. It's a push-feed design with dual-opposed locking lugs and so has the standard 90-degree bolt lift, with case extraction and ejection facilitated by the ever-reliable M16-style ejector and extractor. Such a set-up on the M1500 has never presented any issues and this rifle was no different - if it ain't broke don't fix it. The entire bolt including rear shroud is finished in matte



Howa Carbon Stalker disassembled.



The one-piece M1500 bolt is an all-steel affair without a hint of polymer.



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M1500 breaks the 3kg barrier



It's pleasing that Howa still offer a one-piece steel floorplate and internal magazine box.

black except the rear-facing cocking indicator which is polished steel.

The safety unit is integral to the trigger group and is of a linear three-position design with the selector lever set behind the bolt handle notch. The safety lever in the rear-most position blocks the firing pin and locks the bolt handle down. Moving to the middle position, the firing pin is still blocked but the bolt may be cycled to clear the chamber and fully forward the rifle can now be fired.

The trigger is Howa's patented HACT (Howa Actuator Controlled Trigger) system designed to eliminate creep and lighten the pull. The two-stage trigger is set to roughly 1.4kg from the factory and is adjustable, though an anti-tamper resin on the adjustment screws indicates any tweaks be left to a competent gunsmith. As set from the factory it was perfectly adequate for hunting and general plinking.

Magazine

This is the standard pressed steel internal box design with an alloy floorplate and polymer follower with steel spring. It holds five .308 Winchester rounds in a staggered manner and with the follower presents loaded rounds to the push feed bolt without obstruction. Loading the magazine through

the ejection port is simplicity itself and unloading is as easy as pressing the floorplate release lever on the forward portion.

Stock

The new carbon-fibre stock transforms the rifle into a sub-3kg unit, tipping the scales at 2.83kg with the stock itself weighing a paltry 597g. The stock has a classic American-style pattern with no cheekpieces or combs, a slim pistol grip and fore-end, the texture smooth and devoid of chequering with a quality recoil pad and sling swivel studs fitted as standard. The inletting is spot-on, neatly finished as expected while the Accublock bedding platform for the barrelled action ensures the receiver sits securely in the stock with no movement.

Out and about

The Howa M1500 Carbon Stalker in .308 Winchester was supplied with an impressive optic in the Zeiss V8 1.8-14x50 riflescope with ASV turret system, the complete outfit weighing 3.75kg which is perfect for a rifle intended to be carried long distances. OSA provided hunting ammunition for accuracy testing from PPU, Hornady and GECO which were supplemented by a couple of my favourite

loads for several range sessions. All loads shot well with only the Hornady American Whitetail performing below-par. Any of the other four factory options would make an excellent hunting load for Australian species such as feral goats, pigs and deer and I'd be confident in saying handloaders should be able to produce clover-leaf groups by carefully tailoring powder charges and bullet-seating depth for the utmost in an accurate hunting load. The rifle functioned flawlessly and was a pleasure to shoot with the alpha-scope off the bench.

Overview

You can spend megabucks on a hunting rifle, be it customised or factory-made but at the end of the day all you need do is put your first shot on target for an ethical and humane kill. Renowned US outdoorsman Randy Newberg has used the Howa M1500 as his go-to rifle for more than 10 years and if a hunter of his stature stands by it then it must be better than good.

The addition of a carbon-fibre stock to the options available with the Howa M1500 barrelled action is a feather in the cap for OSA. The Howa Carbon Stalker is available in both short and long action calibres with a price bracket between \$1500-\$2000 and stocks available separately below \$1000, both offered through OSA dealers Australia-wide. More at osaaustralia.com.au ●

Specifications:

Manufacturer: Howa, Japan

Model: M1500 Carbon Stalker

Action: Push-feed bolt-action, twin locking lugs

Barrel: Sporter-weight 560mm (22") chrome molybdenum, cold-hammer forged

Sights: None fitted - clean barrel. Receiver drilled/tapped with Rem-700 pattern scope mounting bases

Trigger: Howa HACT unit, two-stage adjustable, factory-set at 1.4kg

Magazine: Internal steel box with aluminium floorplate. Capacity dependent on calibre (review rifle in .308 Win, five rounds)

Stock: Carbon-fibre with Accublock bedding system

Weight: 2.83kg (bare)

Calibres: As tested .308 Win, available in short and long action calibres (see OSA website for availability)

RRP: Bare rifle from \$1500-\$2000 (depending on specification), stock available separately (below \$1000)

Distributor: Outdoor Sporting Agencies

Howa M1500 Carbon Stalker accuracy test at 100m - groups in mm

Ammunition	Best	Worst	Average*
Sellier & Bellot 180gr SP	16	30	24
Hornady American Whitetail 165gr Interlock	35	55	43
PPU 150gr SP	30	41	34
GECO Express 165gr	14	30	22
Sako Gamehead 150gr SP	20	33	27

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

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On the DOT

Kahles' compact sight made a big impression on Chris Redlich

Rapid acquisition of swift-moving targets used to be solely the domain of rifles with open sights and although sharing decades of history, red dot optics are now the preferred choice for shooters seeking an alternative to open sights on fast-repeating rifles. Like most things released years ago, size was often the trade-off for technological advance and those of a certain age will recall when mobile phones were carried in a bag and weighed about 3kg! I also remember early red dot sights which could be mistaken for a chunky looking small scope which was often a drawback for me and one of the main reasons I stuck with standard low-power riflescopes.

Those cumbersome red dot sights of old appear to be a thing of the past and Kahles of Austria have paved the way for a new era of compact options with the release of their Helia RD-C (Red Dot-Compact). Accepting an invitation by Kahles to review the new sight, I was keen to see just how compact it really was, if it appealed to me and would I buy one over a compact riflescope?

The Helia RD-C is ruggedly built from aircraft-grade aluminium and lived up to its compact tag, measuring only 80mm long with lens covers and weighing a mere 125 grams (battery included). Four screws are supplied to fasten the base mount to the sight's underside and once tightened to an even torque the RD-C can then be attached to a Picatinny rail or weaver-style cross-slot bases. I decided to fasten the sights to the Picatinny rail of my wife Sue-Ann's Savage custom bolt in 7mm-08, a fast-pointing rifle ideal for quick follow-up shots. For those unfamiliar with red dot sights they have generous eye relief, meaning the sights can be positioned almost anywhere on the receiver without hindering your sight picture.

The RD-C has a fixed one power (1x magnification) which is ideal for rapid sight realignment, the 25mm RD-C objective having what Kahles calls an 'anti-reflexion' red filter coating to improve image clarity. Both lenses have flip-up covers to protect against abrasion from dirt and grime and the mount clamps to the Picatinny rail by

simply finger tightening a single butterfly nut. Taking the sight's long eye relief into consideration I mounted the RD-C forward-most on the rail and although of minor weight, purely for balance reasons.

A red dot sight isn't complete without a power source and driving the RD-C is a single CR2032 battery housed within a watertight screw cap compartment on the right of the unit. These sights are surprisingly basic and everything there is to know about them is found in the supplied quick reference guide. The reticle is a precise 2 MOA illuminated red dot designed for minimum target cover but maximum acquisition for close quarters shooting. To power up simply press the + or - (brightness) toggle for two seconds and the same to turn off. Once 'on' the red dot reticle brightness is controlled by the + for higher brightness and - for lower brightness depending on conditions.

'Safelight' or automatic light is activated by simultaneously pressing the + and - for two seconds and the same to turn off. The 'safelight' feature enables the sights to be



Sue-Ann smashes the target offhand at 35m.



Sue-Ann's clay is shattered by a single round.



Checking the property watercourse for feral pigs while field testing the RD-C.

Chris uses Sue-Ann's rifle to smash the clay at 30m offhand.



Chris's clay shot at 30m.

motion activated and will automatically turn off after four hours if the sights and rifle are not in use. To adjust reticle alignment the elevation and windage turrets are located at the 12 and 3'o clock positions as per standard scopes and both have 7cm adjustment value at 50m, so having familiarised myself with the new Helia RD-C I couldn't wait to test it.

Range and field testing

I must disclose if I'd read the instructions a little more carefully I'd have noticed I fastened the base mount back to front which meant the butterfly tightening nut was close to the battery compartment but evidently didn't foul with the cap. I wasn't in a position to reverse the mount out in the field so cracked on with sighting-in. As it turned out my error made no difference to the sight's accuracy and I achieved an outstanding sub 1/2-inch group with two shots from two different loads at 50m, 140-grain Nosler Ballistic tips touching at bang-on zero while the heavier recoiling 150-grain Nosler AccuBond LRs printed 2"

lower. The sighting-in process was a breeze and after some confirmatory shots I was ready for field use.

As most hunters will sympathise game doesn't always turn up on cue and finding a window of opportunity compounded by La Nina was proving a challenge until a clear Saturday afternoon was seized and Sue-Ann and I made the most of it. Feral pigs which were reportedly travelling the waterways of my hunting patch didn't present so we decided to test the Kahles red dot using shotgun clays at varying positions on the ground at close range from 20-50m.

We faced the clays underside in our direction to simulate the dark body of a feral pig while the targets' dimensions were closely representative of a pig's heart to provide a challenging test scenario. Both Sue-Ann and I shot targets from the offhand position with a single shot each, highlighting the versatility of the RD-C and its ability for a different shooter to use the rifle confidently and accurately. Targets were caught on camera by remote means.



Easy adjustment of the windage and elevation turret using a screwdriver.

Conclusion

The Helia RD-C has changed the way I feel about red dot sights. I'm sure other brands manufacture compact sights but Kahles really have produced a class-leading compact unit that's hard to beat. At all times the Helia's red dot maintained zero and all sight pictures were clear and unobstructed during testing. For a quality product backed by Kahles' two-year warranty I've no hesitation in recommending the new Helia RD-C which retails for around \$790 (at time of writing), as a red dot sight worthy of consideration. For Australian stockists and more visit kahles.at or email khles.sia@swarovski.com ●



This predator was shot at 120m with 30-grain Varmint Grenades and the Zastava rifle - a bullet in the chest but no exit.

One for the ages

John Hill salutes the rich history of .22 calibre centrefires

The .223 Remington is one of the most popular cartridges ever made. It suits a lot of hunters as it's not too big and not too small and like Baby Bear's porridge it's just right! Hunters appreciate the cartridge as it's good for both small and medium game and in recent years barrel twist rates have been increased so they can stabilise heavier bullets, down to one turn in 9" where some target barrels are one turn in 7" (the old .222 Remington had standard twist barrels of one-in-14" which prevented heavier bullets from being fired). These new high twist-rate barrels are also good for lightweight bullets like non-lead of the copper/tin core type and mono-metal as the longer a bullet is the more spin it requires to stabilise.

The .223 is the end product of many years of painstaking effort in developing

.22 calibre centrefires and the history is long and interesting. It began back in the late 1920s when Captain G.L. Watkins, Townsend Whelen and others at the Springfield Armoury started experimenting with what we know today as the .22 Hornet. By substituting smokeless for black powder and using a copper jacketed bullet instead of a lead one, they increased velocity of the old .22 Winchester centrefire by about 1000fps and so was born the .22 Hornet.

Winchester produced ammunition for the Hornet before any rifles were built with Savage being first on the scene. Considering the economic situation of the early 1930s it seemed a bad time to release a new rifle and cartridge, yet the .22 Hornet captured shooters' imaginations and became quite popular. There is another version of the .22 Hornet and that's the K Hornet, an improved version of the standard form.

I've had a bit to do with improved chambers and the increase in powder capacity in the K Hornet is one-and-a-bit grains depending on the brand of case used. When a case contains about 10 or 11 grains of powder that's a sizable increase (about 10 per cent) but firing a standard Hornet cartridge in an improved K chamber has a loss of about 75fps and it takes roughly a half-grain of powder to make up that difference. So an improved chamber has about ½ or ¾ of a grain of powder which gives the bullet a mild increase in velocity and there's no disputing a K-chambered Hornet does produce increased velocity.

The .22 Hornet was followed in 1935 by the .220 Swift, then in 1937 the .219 Zipper and finally the .218 Bee the following year, again all by Winchester. The Zipper is extinct, the Swift had its ups and downs and is almost defunct, as is the Bee, so all



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One for the ages

these cartridges other than the .22 Hornet are now obsolete or close to it. Both the Swift and Hornet are at extreme ends of the velocity spectrum with handloaders increasing Hornet loads while they loaded down the Swift (a fully-loaded Swift would burn out a barrel in record time while a Hornet barrel would last a lifetime).

In the late 1930s Harvey Donaldson, an experimenter of some repute, spent a good deal of time developing 'wildcats' (non-factory made cartridges) and came up with one he called the .219 Donaldson Wasp, a cartridge which earned a good reputation in Benchrest shooting in the 1940s and early '50s. It's interesting to note all these .22 centrefires were formed from existing rimmed or semi-rimmed cases, the Donaldson Wasp from .219 Zipper, the .218 Bee from .25/20 and .220 Swift from 6mm Lee Navy semi-rimmed case. All these hotshot .22 centrefires used ammunition made from other cases necked down and loaded to different ballistics.

Winchester had a mindset that favoured lever-actioned rifles and the .219 Zipper and .218 Bee were originally chambered in those. Now a lever-actioned rifle with open sights leaves something to be desired as far as accuracy is concerned so if Winchester had included some bolt-actioned rifles with the release of these cartridges, the Bee and Zipper may have been a different story. Some bolt-actioned rifles were made later but it was too little, too late to save these cartridges.

All these .22 centrefires were either rimmed or semi-rimmed without exception



Martini Cadet chambered for .218 Bee, very accurate for a 3kg rifle.

which can spell trouble in box-type magazines where the top rim gets behind the rim below it and the magazine locks up and doesn't feed. In a tube magazine everything is fine but you have to use flat-nosed bullets or large hollow-points as 'pointy' bullets may set off the cartridges in the magazine with recoil.

In 1950 Remington came up with a new rimless case design, deciding that necking down some existing case wasn't the best thing to do, with the result being the new .222 Remington which took the world by surprise. This cartridge was like nothing before in the .22 centrefire bracket, with

the case being an entirely different design. The .222 Remington fired a 50-grain bullet at 3200fps which almost duplicated the Donaldson Wasp and bettered the .22 Hornet and .218 Bee, so many shooters abandoned the Bee, Zipper and Wasp for the new .222 Remington which had a good reputation as a Benchrest round. Remington followed up with the .222 Magnum, .223 Remington and .221 Fireball which is a pistol cartridge.

The .222 Magnum is now obsolete as the .223 Remington has replaced it. The former was never very popular but as the two cartridges are similar in performance,



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CALIBRE	WEIGHT	VELOCITY	BULLET STYLE	BALLISTIC COEFFICIENT	PACKAGE QUANTITY	USAGE
22 WMR	40 gr	1910 fps	Pointed Soft Point	.113	50, 500 or 2,000	Small game
22 WMR	40 gr	1910 fps	Jacketed Hollow Point	.117	50, 500 or 2,000	Small game



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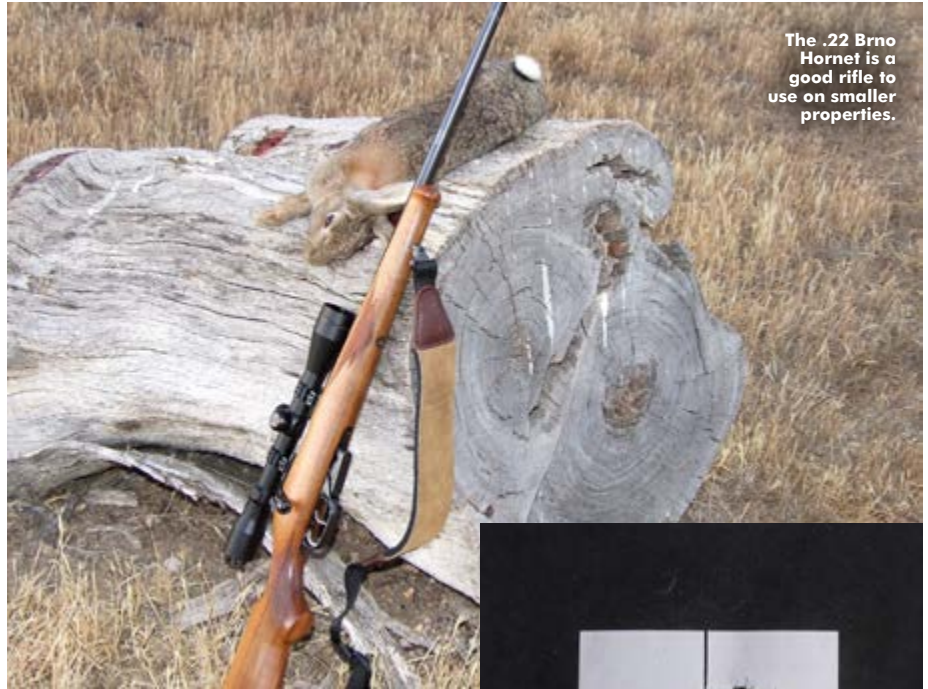


One for the ages

the .223 took over and it was this one which caused the demise of some popular cartridges. Winchester tried replacing the .220 Swift with the .225 Winchester which was quite a good option but it too became outdated as not many shooters liked it. Winchester, which started the .22 centre-fire revolution, has lost the lead it once had and gone are the heady days of the 1930s when they developed four new .22 centrefire cartridges in less than a decade. In 1964 Remington introduced the .22-250 Remington cartridge, originally a wildcat which built a huge following and now that it's factory-loaded and legitimised, that original wildcatter J.E. Gebby could take pride in the fact that his cartridge made it to be mass produced.

The .224 Weatherby Varmintmaster was a new cartridge and also a belted Magnum. It replaced the .220 Weatherby Rocket which was an improved .220 Swift that burnt out barrels at an alarming rate and didn't survive long (about 20 years). Weatherby were keen on high velocities and it's quite understandable their Rocket was developed. The Varmintmaster was comparable with .225 Winchester and .22-250 Remington and Weatherby even chambered for the .22-250 Remington in the Mark V action though I might add I know no-one who bought a Varmintmaster and I believe it may also be obsolete.

And speaking of obsolete I reckon that list includes the .218 Bee, 219 Zipper, .220 Swift, .225 Winchester and .224 Weatherby, all of which no rifle manufacturers chamber for, though there may be some made by custom gunsmiths but it's a reloading proposition only as there are no cartridges to



The .22 Brno Hornet is a good rifle to use on smaller properties.

buy. The .22 Hornet has survived for close on a century and a few rifle manufacturers still chamber for it. I have two rifles in .22 Hornet, a Zastava and a Brno, and believe it's an excellent small game rifle out to 150m.

I also have a .218 Bee built on a Martini Cadet action which shoots sub-minute of angle with 40-grain V-Max bullets averaging 2900fps, which considering the Martini action with its weak extraction and stretchy action isn't too shabby. It could be loaded up to higher velocities in a bolt-action rifle but shoots quite well as-is. The



A target shot at 100m with the Martini .218 Bee - a 10-shot group with two fliers but it's the eight-shot which shows the rifle's accuracy. Total group size 0.775 MOA.

.218 Bee is good for medium range, small game shooting and I use mine on rabbits, foxes and targets.

Sourcing ammunition is a bit concerning with Winchester supplying cases about 15 years ago and Hornady offering some more recently though I have 300 cases for my Bee so don't have to worry for a while. The gunsmith who built my rifle used a Vickers .303-22 barrel of which he cut off the chamber and thread and recut the thread to suit the Martini and re-chambered for .218 Bee and I've used the rifle for more than 30 years.

So there's a brief history of the .22 centrefires which go back almost 100 years while many rifle cartridges have fallen by the wayside at the whim of shooters who have the last say on whether a cartridge fails or succeeds. It's a scramble to be top dog and the .223 Remington seems to have come out ahead, closely followed by the .22-250 Remington. The former is a gentle round which suits a lot of shooters and is likely to stay that way but who knows, someone may come up with an entirely new design though that's doubtful. ●



Foxes which fell to the Martini .218 Bee.



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.22 LR | 10 22 WMR | 10



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Pilliga

perseverance

Determined Mark van den Boogaart finally got his goat

Sometimes you make your own luck and sometimes you just get lucky. As we began planning our regular trip to the Pilliga it wasn't all plain sailing as sorting everyone's family and work commitments to align is never easy and it was in finding a spare week we hit the first snag. Tim, a founding member of the crew, couldn't make it and we were down to three so to balance it out we put an offer to Jonathan who eventually locked in a date.

It seemed Diana, Artemis, Woden and all the other gods and goddesses of hunting had cut us some slack and we were away, Simon and Darcy heading down on Saturday with Jonathan and I due on Sunday. On arrival we found the Pilliga in bloom and even our campsite had a covering of grass, the dams full with plenty of additional ground water while the dust had been flattened by the latest rain.

Our usual approach to hunting the Pilliga is to work in pairs with each picking a separate area to explore, that way we cover a lot of ground and have a better understanding

of game movement. Rolling out of camp on that first morning with Simon our expectations were high though what followed was a fruitless day, sure we saw game but only fleeting glimpses of speeding goats.

Heading back to camp around 2pm we caught up with Darcy and Jonathan who'd had pretty much the same day with the odd goat spotted but little else. We thought the best thing would be to sit on a dam and await game coming in to water late in the afternoon, the trouble being nothing showed and at camp that night we could only hope things would improve tomorrow.

Early next day Darcy and I spotted goats either dashing across the track or in deep cover and try as we might we couldn't get within shooting range so began to explore. Eventually we found some good sign and came close to finally taking a shot though it just wasn't to be. We found ourselves heading to base just on sunset, speculating on how Simon and Jonathan had fared which sadly was Groundhog Day all over again.

Over coffee on Wednesday we decided to target an entirely different section of

the Pilliga. We had a 90-minute run ahead of us but aimed for a far-off track junction where we could split into pairs to cover new ground and rather than focus on dams we stopped to check out the mostly dry sand creeks. Now almost all the creeks held sign but we decided to focus on volume of traffic (the more the better), also checking for freshness and if it didn't look like it was made earlier that day we'd move on.

The game sign became our compass bearing and eventually we found ourselves near a significant rock outcrop. Making good with the wind we circled the base of the outcrop and walked up on goats which were still holding in small groups rather than mobs and right in front was a good nanny and billy. Taking aim, Jonathan dropped the billy and just like that we had a goat on the ground, the small success giving a much-needed lift.

We dressed out the meat, took the horns and packed it back to the truck and on loading realised we were late for our catch-up at the track junction. Pulling up, the first thing we saw were the smiles as Simon

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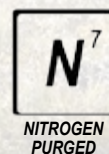
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Included: Sunshade & scope caps



Pilliga perserverance

had also managed to down a billy so with a new sense of purpose we headed towards another junction point where we'd again split up.

Luck was with us now and along the way Simon and Darcy spotted more goats, the latter in pursuit managing to drop another two in sight of the vehicles. After a swift carry-out we were back on our way though unlike the morning the afternoon proved tough and sitting on another dam we waited and watched the abundant birdlife. Just before sunset we packed and headed back to our vehicles as it was clear the game was staying away from big water. We assumed that as goats were in small groups, ground water was all they needed for now so were travelling less and avoiding the dams.

Thursday rolled around and while the crew had taken goats I was yet to fire a shot so we headed south to where a number of creeks split and rejoined a main branch line. The amount of water which had flushed through the system must have been terrifying as huge trees were lodged in the creek bed with banks sharply cut out, sometimes to a height of more than 10 feet. New channels had also been blasted through with old banks washed away altogether and among it all were small, shaded pools of water.

Animal tracks told their story and those small pools were indeed the water supply with both native and feral tracks surrounding the creek bed and it was while following one set I spotted movement. It was a large black pig, too far off to tell if it was boar or sow but I didn't care and began following it but over the course of an hour it proved too wily. Eventually making my way to the meeting point, Simon and I moved on until we crossed a small creek bed with lots of sign. We made right with the wind, headed up creek and found some of the best sign of the whole trip, active wallows and plenty of goat traffic among the small water-holes and wet depressions.

According to the GPS we were just under a kilometre from the car when I cut some



The hunters' home for the week.



In the Pilliga, fallen trees are common and clearing a track is a necessity.



This camp-raiding goanna tried to make off with some trophy horns.

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Pilliga perserverance

active sign leading to a fallen tree. The branches still covered in green leaves were providing shade over the soft sand and in whispered tones I let Simon know I felt there were pigs about, so much so I cycled the action, made the rifle 'safe' and gave a thumbs-up. I seldom hunt with a chambered round but felt we might quickly go from sleepy pigs to running pigs so approached with caution but after another word with Simon I cleared the rifle and moved on.

Spotting another fallen tree ahead I pushed towards the left bank to give myself the best firing angle and around 60m from the tree and with Simon 20m behind I stopped to glass the foliage. While I couldn't see pigs I spotted a goat 20m further on. Things were finally in my favour as the goat was oblivious and while I could see it, my shape was absorbed by the bank with Simon well concealed by scrub.

Raising my hand to attract attention, I pointed towards the goat and noticed the change in Simon's posture when he saw it too. I kept glassing and as luck would have it there was a small mob of good meat animals 40m back on the right-hand bank. While Simon was literally in line with the mob, a combination of heavy foliage and the fact he was armed with his new Ruger .450 Bushmaster meant he really should edge a little closer.

We inched forward and while luck had been with us I felt we may be pushing it as the goat might spot either one of us. I saw Simon crouched behind a fallen tree and via several odd hand signals let him know I was going to shoot the lead goat, so shouldered my .30-06 and dropped it where it stood. We kept quiet and out of sight and while the



Freezers are now full!

other goats were wary they weren't leaving so from our concealed positions we took aim and brought down another six.

After the shooting is when the hard work really begins and it took two return trips over a couple of hours to retrieve the meat. By the time we'd finished we were pretty much done and after rehydrating headed back to camp a lot quicker than we'd left that morning. Soon after, Jonathan and Darcy rolled in asking how we'd done as Simon and I casually replied "only seven".

As it was our last day's hunting I was keen to see if I could manage a pig but again struck out though Jonathan took a black billy with well-presented horns. Early next day we packed up, headed for the highway and during that seven-hour drive the conversation shifted from the week just past to planning our next trip and how something that didn't look like it would happen turned into another great Pilliga hunting adventure. ●



Jonathan with the billy which ended an early run of bad luck.



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Sporting chance

Rizzini boxlock shotgun delighted John McDougall

There are some amazing shotguns on the market these days with a myriad of options but one I immediately enjoyed was the latest offering from Rizzini - the BR110 Sporting. From many reports coming out of the US this gun has taken shooters by storm, being so popular on performance, value and price. The Rizzini moniker is a long-established and respected name in shotgun manufacture in Italy and I can testify their firearms are no slouches in the Sporting Clays discipline.

The latest model is superb, a word I don't use lightly, the gun offering what I consider a best-buy in the boxlock category due mainly to its overall presentation, performance, balance and swing. It's sure to appeal to many shooters searching for a sporting gun which gives the user every chance of notching top scores. Of all its virtues (and there are many) the most appealing isn't the stunning

woodwork or wonderful appearance but performance of the chokes, as the damage done at the scoring end was awesome and to say I enjoyed testing this gun is an understatement.

Barrels

At 760mm (30") the barrels of the Rizzini BR110 Sporting are immaculately assembled and ingeniously finished with matte black blueing for resilience to rust and scratching which coincidentally matches the black Cerakote coating of the action frame. Silver soldered for optimum strength, the side and top ribs are ventilated to enable heat to dissipate and provide a lighter overall feel while swinging the gun on targets. The muzzle end of the tapered top rib, moving from 10mm at the breech to 7mm at the muzzle, instantly draws the shooter's eye to the target while a white barrel-type front sight couples well with the brass bead mid-sight to provide a sighting

plane for mounting the gun quickly and precisely.

Extended choke tubes measuring 90mm with knurled collars are fitted at the muzzle. There are five of these supplied with the gun and each choke collar has a colour code for its constriction as well as written notation on the coloured band. The choke tube spanner is resilient and enables the chokes to be tightened well in what is a propeller-type design.

The receiver end of the barrels has 3" Magnum chambers and the gun is CIP proofed for steel shot HP loads, the Fleur de Lys proof mark stamped on the monobloc (four lumps protrude from the bottom of the monobloc to lock into the receiver floor). The gun is bifurcated jointed with replaceable hinge pins and a solid underbolt is used to lock the action in place, a secure and strong feature of this gun. Jewel polishing about the monobloc is appreciated as this is necessary to contain lubricants



Overall picture of the latest Rizzini BR110 from Italy, a gun set to make a big impression.



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Rizzini boxlock shotgun

about the action and prevent wear and personally I prefer a Teflon-based lubricant as greases and thick oils attract grit and residue from powder.

One of the outstanding features is the XL Bore treatment which has the barrels over-bored along with significantly lengthened forcing cones. Coupled with the extended and 'tuned' XL Bore choke tubes the patterns are awesome, smashing targets and reducing them to dust. I was highly impressed as this is what a shooter seeks from a sporting firearm, targets not just broken but absolutely destroyed.

Receiver

As mentioned this is matte black Cerakoted to match the barrels with the only parts seemingly blued and polished being the fore-end iron, triggerguard, trigger foot and top lever. Design of the top lever is practical with a good bearing surface for the release of the barrels from the action, the barrel selector-cum-safety catch well located on the top tang and not easily moved by accident which is ideal. Red enamel dots are present in the mechanism of the barrel selector, a handy addition to enable shooters to readily identify which barrel will be firing first.

Embellishment about the receiver is minimal apart from the Rizzini name stamped on each side and the name and model number into the underside. The triggerguard is of a reasonable size to accommodate thin leather gloves while the trigger mechanism is inertia operated, requiring the first barrel to be fired before the second can be. Trigger weights are quite safe at



Excellent fit and finish are hallmarks of the Rizzini BR110 Sporting.

precisely 4lb (1.8kg) for each barrel, metal-to-metal fit about the barrels and receiver being excellent while the wood-to-metal inletting is perfect at every joining surface.

Stock and fore-end

Character and grain structure of the oil-finished Turkish walnut used for the stock and fore-end are sensational and I haven't seen another boxlock gun with such stunning wood. The fore-end is a standard Trap style while the stock is regular without an adjustable comb piece but the walnut stocking is a much-appreciated feature. And there's a factory-fitted recoil pad for those who care to take their Rizzini BR110



Proof marks on the receiver block indicate the gun is suited to HP steel shot loadings.



Nicely raked pistol grip with extensive chequering.



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Rizzini boxlock shotgun



Barrel selector/safety catch and top lever.



Choke tubes are 90mm long, colour-coded about the muzzle end for easy identification.

John puts the Rizzini BR110 through its paces during a wet afternoon at Frankston Gun Club.



Sporting into a swamp to shoot ducks or geese with Magnum 3" steel HP shot loads.

I was impressed by the move away from a fore-end latch by incorporating a catch release button in the front. This is adjustable if required but I found it a far better method of releasing the fore-end than a lever catch traditionally inletted into the underbelly of the fore-end. For shooter comfort Rizzini also incorporates a palm-swell on the gun which, along with the raked pistol grip, are well appreciated and will help with control and solid mounting. Chequering on the stock and fore-end runs out to 26 lines/inch with covering of both the pistol grip and fore-end, a 'T' stock tool also supplied if you want to change stocks, say from the standard one fitted to a Trap or adjustable comb.

Over the Traps

There's not a great deal more I can say about the Rizzini BR110 Sporting other than I believe it will be very well received here. The gun is beautifully assembled and shoots even better than it looks so yes, you could say I was impressed. On speaking to a chap who was using one while I was testing the review gun, he was more than happy with his purchase and the way it was shooting.

After many years of testing guns on pattern sheets, those days are gone as I realise different loads pattern differently through the same gun. My assessment method now is to take the gun out and shoot it at flying clay targets, as that's where the acid test is done. Patterns from the Rizzini BR110 Sporting were decisive with a variety of rounds and as most targets were destroyed I can only relay what I experienced. I believe for a gun such as this, given the innovative development in this new model, it's wonderful value for money at around \$4000 including case, accessories and a five-year warranty. ●



Innovative button release in front of the woodwork to free the fore-end from the barrels.

Specifications:

- Maker:** Rizzini, Italy
- Distributor:** SJS Trading, Melbourne
sjs trading.com.au
- Model:** Rizzini BR110 Sporting 12-gauge over-and-under shotgun
- Overall length:** 1230mm/48 $\frac{3}{8}$ "
- Barrel length:** 760mm/30"
- Overall weight:** 3.80kg/8lb 5oz
- Barrel weight:** 1.55kg/3lb 7oz
- Bore size:** 18.64mm/0.734"
- Chamber:** 76mm/3" Magnum. HP steel shot proof
- Chokes:** Sporting chokes 90mm with external collars. Cylinder: Blue/0.747", Imp Cylinder: Gold/0.727", Imp Modified: Black/0.707" and Full: Silver/0.698" (Modified choke not supplied with test gun)
- Trigger pulls:** Both barrels 4lb/1.8kg
- Stock dimensions:** Length of pull 380mm/15", drop at comb 38mm/1 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", drop at heel 60mm/2 $\frac{3}{8}$ "
- RRP:** \$3950 including case, accessories and gun socks (advertising material and instruction booklet included)
- Warranty:** Five years

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Steady as she goes

Caldwell's new shooting bench impressed Con Kapralos

The name Caldwell is synonymous with quality shooting and hunting accessories, being well known in this country for their excellent shooting rests including the legendary Rock range and equally impressive Lead Sled. They also make a host of accessories such as targets (paper, steel and inanimate), handy range knick-knacks and safety gear. At a promotional day hosted by Australian distributor NIOA, an item which appealed to all present was the Caldwell Stable Table Lite Shooting Bench.

For the avid shooter or hunter who likes to plink away on their local patch or sight-in rifles properly, this dandy unit has no equal. No more shooting over the car bonnet or lying in the dirt and grass, this super-stable and compact shooting table folds up for easy transportation in the car boot and measures just 20cm x 90cm when folded.

The unit consists of a shooting platform (table) and rotating seat made from all-weather, high-density moulded plastic, the table surface measuring 86x58cm and catering to both left and right-handed shooters with ample room for all manner of shooting rests and anything else you might need. The front of the table has two aluminium legs (81cm tall) at each corner and the rotating seat has three with a seat height of 43cm. The seat pivots in any direction around the rear of the table for shooting from the left or right side while the whole unit weighs less than 13kg and supports up to 113kg in weight (the seat, not the table). When folded a moulded carry handle in the tabletop makes transportation a breeze.

At the NIOA range day the bench was fitted with a Caldwell Lead Sled which is quite a large unit and does take a bit of time to set up properly but the ergonomics of the bench were excellent, even for a 183cm and 100kg individual like me! Plinking with a selection of rimfires was done with total accuracy and stability and I can confidently



say both rimfire and centrefire shooting would be done in complete comfort using an appropriate rest or bipod.

For between \$350 and \$430, this would be the perfect partner for trips away, be that range or field and it even doubles as a gun-cleaning bench and would make an

excellent shooting platform in a ground blind, something I've become a fan of during the past 10 years. The product is available through the NIOA dealer network Australia-wide and find more on the Caldwell range at nioa.com.au ●



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Don't take it for granted

Sam Garro on the importance of nurturing hunting access

We all have needs and wants, aspirations and goals in life with farmers, graziers, property owners and their families being no different as they also like to feel connected and their toil as food producers is meaningful. City dwellers live a life of convenience with most facilities at our fingertips from shopping, health services and entertainment to education and job opportunities and to escape from things we turn to the freedom of the outdoors.

For those on the land, especially in more isolated or remote outback areas, with the exception of communication services and the occasional community festive gathering they're cut off from the social interaction we're used to in cities and towns. And while theirs is a chosen lifestyle with their own unique set of circumstances, challenges and setbacks they must still endure and carry on, hence my respect and admiration for who they are and what they represent.

Fostering relationships

Over the years my interaction with property owners and managers has always been one of respect and understanding, adhering to their requirements and any directive associated with hunting on their land, yet fostering and cementing a relationship with an owner takes patience, persistence and time to gradually gain their trust. A phone call before the intended visit is always appreciated, firstly as a matter of courtesy and secondly as there may be farming activities which take precedence such as crutching sheep or shearing and crop harvesting. Furthermore, if you've earned their trust they'll want their contact details kept confidential.

What you don't want is an associate or acquaintance ringing the owner without your knowledge or showing up inappropriately inferring it was done with your approval. Then the issue escalates with more people seeking to access the property

and creating all sorts of undesirable behaviour and I've experienced a situation where everyone was locked out including the person who'd put so much effort into securing access.

Need to be connected

Folk on the land may not see a new face for weeks or months so genuinely taking time to sit down and have a conversation with them I've found is always welcomed. They learn what's happening in suburbia or the city and we in turn derive an appreciation for their way of life and issues affecting them. It also provides a chance to catch up on recent property activities, any feral game issues and the whereabouts of game. And if from time to time a request is made to cull damaging ferals such as rabbits, lamb-predating foxes, wild dogs or pigs I don't hesitate to assist.

Gaining a property owner's trust is crucial and how you do that is up to the



individual but if you're open and transparent, for example by providing your contact details and vehicle rego as I've done, including your SSAA membership or Farmer Assist ID if held, this shows you're genuine. Also of significant importance, which as members we may be remiss to refer, is revealing details of the SSAA Members' Liability Insurance as stated on the reverse of your membership card "when you give permission to current SSAA members to shoot on your property you know they've agreed to abide by the Association's Code of Conduct. In addition, their actions are covered by the Association's \$20,000,000 Public Liability Insurance," the wording continues. In the end, even if access is denied, thank them for their time and if they're receptive, leave your details for future consideration.

Demonstrating appreciation

To show my gratitude for the privilege

to hunt on a property I never go empty-handed, taking any surplus hardware or items like nuts and bolts which could be used around the property or anything they might need that's not easily obtainable due to their remote location. Usually they're self-reliant and often politely decline the gesture, but you might be surprised what little they might ask for and, if it's significant cost-wise, they're happy to cover it. One property manager's favourite food was garfish though different things appeal to different people and you can only know by asking. Inviting the property owner or manager to a meal in camp and offering to share the game meat harvested is another way of demonstrating your appreciation.

On a frequented property in outback NSW, to drive through a seldom-accessed part of the land supporting stretches of cumbungi reeds and feral pigs we had to untie copious amounts of wire around a loose post supporting fencing so we could

enter. With the property owner's permission - and as a member of our group had a used but in good condition set of galvanised double gates sitting idle at home - we installed those gates next time we visited, making it easier for us and the owner to use and achieved a 'win-win' outcome. Whether it's an appreciative gesture or extending a hand in whatever practical capacity or just being a friend, it pays to nurture a relationship.

Being self-sufficient

Planning and preparing for a trip is important to avoid possible setbacks later. Ensuring the main tank and auxiliary (if fitted) is topped-up at the last filling station before heading for the property or carrying extra fuel in jerry cans will allow greater than anticipated mileage on the property in search of game or new hunting areas. Take sufficient provisions and fresh water to last the duration of your stay as while



Don't take it for granted

properties should carry tank water, in drought conditions precious drinking water at times has to be tanked in at considerable cost. A quick courtesy call beforehand will determine requirements here.

Some aids which can save the day in the event of a flat tyre, negotiating sandy or muddy terrain or to haul yourself out a bog are a tyre repair kit, small air compressor, shovel, high lift jack, winch and recovery gear, track boards and an axe. And for other unforeseen breakdowns a toolbox, some top-up engine oil, bottle of brake fluid, spare radiator hoses, fan belts and fuses come in handy (a medical kit is obviously a must).

On a rare occasion while rabbiting in saltbush country we returned to camp just as the two front tyres of my ute started to slowly deflate, though luckily we had a puncture repair kit and associated gear to get out of trouble. Another time my mate's vehicle became stranded in a paddock with each tyre sunk into separate rabbit burrows, so he wasn't going anywhere. My high-lift jack and pieces of lumber jammed under each tyre finally extracted him with the aid of a winch, proving if effort is made to ensure the vehicle is mechanically sound beforehand and back-up gear is carried, most breakdowns can be satisfactorily dealt with.

Communication

A UHF radio, mobile phone (where there's reception) or satellite phone is an invaluable communication tool especially in the event of emergency or serious injury. Keeping emergency channels handy and a separate one open with the property owner provides a line of communication, particularly if heavy rain or bad weather is fast approaching and you might need to be warned.

On the property

If gates are open then leave them open, if shut then ensure they're shut properly so



Building a safe campfire.

livestock can't come through. If safe to light a campfire, excavate a shallow hollow, build a bit of a dirt wall around the edges, ensure the surrounding area is cleared for a couple of metres to guarantee flying embers or sparks don't start a fire and keep a bucket of water handy.

Always place tents and equipment well away from the campfire. If the ground is soggy or rain affected, to avoid gouging up the property tracks with deep furrows and making it dangerous for the owner to move around on his trail or quad bike, drive slowly to the sides where there's a bit of growth and traction for the tyres. Property owners on large stations can't be everywhere so reporting livestock in distress or trouble - like sheep or cattle bogged in mud or caught in a ditch - will be appreciated and these simple actions go a long way to show you're a responsible and caring person.

Obeying directives

Understanding an owner or manager has



Coffee break with the property owner after slashing tall grass.

certain responsibilities, as well as directly or indirectly taking into consideration your wellbeing on the property, adhering to any restriction or directive, whether it's restrictive shooting in or near lambing paddocks or any other farm-related reason is crucial to maintaining trust.

Conclusion

There are no guarantees access to properties will last indefinitely as circumstances beyond our control often dictate otherwise. These days, even though my relationship with the property owner or farmer is a healthy one, I'm conscious things can change so try to make the most of every trip and remain appreciative for the privilege to hunt on someone else's land. ●



Mates assisting the undermanned farmer herd cattle into the yards.

Gun crime sadly alive and well in the UK

John Maxwell

Most shooters would be familiar with the US and its relaxed firearm legislation and high rate of gun crime but what about the UK with its strict laws and surge in handgun violence? On August 22 last year the country was horrified by a senseless tragedy in which a masked gunman, pursuing another person, shot dead nine-year-old Olivia Pratt-Korbel and wounded her mother in their Liverpool home. The gunman fled in a waiting car in what appears to have been a drug-related incident, police subsequently making several arrests and charging a man with the child's murder.

Olivia was the third person shot in Liverpool that week with data from the UK Home Office revealing two out of three police force areas in England and Wales are reporting rising gun crime, one of them facing levels which have escalated six-fold in a decade. Yet Britain routinely defends the rigour of its gun laws, especially in any discussion involving the US. Private ownership of handguns is banned completely, so what's going on?

Criminals of course. Firearm crime statistics released by the House of Commons in July 2022 show there were 35 shooting murders in the year to March 31, 2021 - six per cent of all homicides in that period. The interesting data is buried in the figures which give a clear indication of just



Former Wimbledon champion Andy Murray survived the Dunblane massacre, Britain's worst mass shooting.

how many legal and illegal firearms were involved in those 35 deaths with just two of them licensed, 30 unlicensed and three unknown.

Naturally these numbers vary year-on-year but criminal use of guns for murder has consistently far exceeded those by licensed shooters and it's much the same in Australia. For example in 2019-20 in the UK, seven legal guns were used to commit murder as opposed to 15 by crims and five unknown while in 2018-19 one licensed firearm was used for murder with 26 by criminals and four unknown.

And there's plenty of other gun crime which falls well short of murder. England and Wales (not Scotland and Northern Ireland) makes the curious practice (to Australian shooters) of separately recording crime committed with airguns (31 per cent) and non-air firearms (5709 offences or 69 per cent). That's because there are a lot of airguns there and they've never been heavily regulated, unlike Australia where air rifles fall into Class A alongside rimfire rifles and shotguns with air pistols going into Class H with handguns.

Anyone over 18 in the UK can buy and use an air rifle or air pistol provided it doesn't exceed the power limit of 6ft-lb for air pistols and 12 for rifles. Over those limits it's treated as a regular firearm requiring a Firearms Certificate (licence) and by law, criminal misuse of any air arm is treated as if it was misuse of a conventional firearm.

Home Office stats go into some details about other types of gun offences, headed by violence against the person, criminal damage (mostly involving air arms), possession and robbery. What stands out is the prevalence of handguns - 2125 offences including 24 deaths against 56 for rifles with only one death. Shotguns were used in 295 offences with six deaths, sawn-off shotguns in 241 with two deaths while imitation firearms featured in 1438 with, of course, no loss of life.

Throughout its colonial history Britain imposed few restrictions on firearms but that began to change in the 20th century, firstly with the 1903 Pistols Act which imposed some restrictions on buying handguns including a prohibition on sales



Innocent victim: Nine-year-old Olivia was shot in her Liverpool home.

Gun crime sadly alive and well in the UK

to anyone mentally ill or drunk. That was followed by the 1920 Firearms Act which introduced certificates and a licensing regime prompted by an influx of guns after World War One and rising concerns they could be used for revolution by the disaffected working classes.

Over the years various laws added further restrictions but the current regime very much stems from two incidents, both mass murders by licensed shooters using legally-owned firearms. In August 1987 at Hungerford in England, a man shot dead 16 people then himself using a handgun and a pair of semi-automatic rifles and, like our Port Arthur tragedy, the result was a ban on self-loading centrefire rifles though .22 self-loaders remain legal.

On March 13, 1996 a man used four legally-owned handguns to shoot dead 16 primary school students, their teacher and himself at Dunblane in Scotland. This occurred just six weeks before Port Arthur and some expert opinion suggests the media coverage of Dunblane inspired the Tasmanian killer. The UK Government responded to Dunblane with a complete ban on private ownership of handguns with a few exemptions for collectable antiques and that ended competitive handgun shooting in Britain, even at Olympic level, though it's

possible for dedicated UK athletes to train in mainland Europe.

That ban clearly means handgun crime is wholly down to criminals and to keep all this in perspective, the UK crime and murder rate remains low compared to other developed nations and its long-term trend in gun crime is downwards. The country has an overall murder rate comparable to that of Australia.

Latest figures from the Australian Institute of Criminology's national homicide monitoring program show there were 278 murder victims in 261 incidents in 2019-20 for a rate of 1.08 per 100,000 population. A gun was used in 34 of those. UK figures for the same period show 695 victims at a rate of 1.17 per 100,000 population, a substantial increase on the previous year due to a single incident in which 39 perished in a people smuggler's truck. Knives account for the majority of murder victims with 37 per cent (104 victims) in Australia and 39 per cent (235) in Britain.

Criminologist Professor Peter Squires, a UK authority on gun crime, notes two types of illegal firearms have tended to pre-occupy gun control researchers - 'grey' firearms which incline to be souvenirs and antiques deemed to pose little threat. The threat mainly comes from illegal weapons in the

possession of offenders, he wrote on *The Conversation* website, but unless a gun is recovered by police or fired in the course of an offence it will remain (largely) unknown.

The UK National Ballistic Intelligence Service (NABIS) lists what it terms 'criminally active' firearms, derived from witness reports or ballistic evidence, research indicating around 90 per cent of guns are only ever used once and anything which doesn't resurface for 12 months falls off the active list. Many of these are dumped, most commonly in the nearest canal. Only a small number of firearms are used multiple times with NABIS suggesting there are around 1000 criminally active firearms in Britain, a surprisingly small number and an interesting concept which would also appear to apply in Australia.

So where do UK criminals source their firearms? The problem is its proximity to Europe where guns haven't always been rigorously regulated and exist in large numbers after the demise of the former Soviet Union and a succession of wars, most recently in the Balkans. Illegal guns enter the country the same way as drugs, concealed inside cargo from the Continent while some British service personnel returning from Iraq and Afghanistan have been responsible for importing an unknown number of firearms including AK-pattern assault rifles.

British police encounter many reactivated imitation and blank-firing handguns termed 'junk weapons' which are neither reliable nor safe and the same applies to so-called 'slam guns', basically a crudely-machined steel tube, suggesting fully operational firearms are actually quite difficult to acquire. Most UK gang violence and gun crime occurs in large urban centres and effective police action has been hindered by cutbacks, particularly at street level, as evidence shows that where they have directed personnel and resources specifically at gun crime, it has had a significant impact.

In 1998 London's Metropolitan Police launched Operation Trident to target rising gang-related gun crime. And in 2004 police in Manchester launched Operation XCalibre for the same reason, both proving effective at reducing gun crime. Yet heavy-handed tactics were also directed at legitimate owners such as collector Mick Shepherd who police claimed supplied the guns used in 14 gang-related shootings and three murders. They were not and after nine months in custody he was acquitted on all 13 charges after lawyers successfully argued his large antiques collection was entirely legal. ●

The picturesque market town of Hungerford was the unlikely setting for Britain's second-worst mass shooting.



Meet the Silhouette shooting 'family'

Sharon MacDonald



As I wandered up and down the line with my camera at last year's Lever Action Silhouette National Championships at the Majura Range in Canberra, I was noting who I had and hadn't photographed yet and it was while rattling off names in my head I started to notice a pattern among the competitors. Tobler x 2, Austin x 2, MacDonald, Teale, Smith, Williams, Vine, Butler, Livermore, Eagles and Tobler again . . . all x 2. And the connection? Families!

We often talk about our Silhouette family, people who share their knowledge and experience with each other, fierce competitors while on the line competing and great mates when relaxing off it. Many of us have known each other for years and been to each other's weddings, seen the next generation born and now competing, been to funerals of family and fellow shooters. We loan each other equipment, stay at each other's places when we holiday or travel to and from shoots, laugh and tell stories about each other - the things all families do.

Those fortunate enough to have travelled overseas to compete have met some wonderful people and now have

international family as well. There have been a number of brothers-in-law who've teamed up over the years and there was a daughter-in-law competing in Canberra, yet this time there were no fewer than 10 actual families on the line - eight fathers and sons, one father and daughter and one entire family of both parents and three daughters. This is a family sport so welcome to Silhouette.

It might just be the ultimate safe family sport as where else can you compete both with and against your children or even your parents? Of course many sports have family links where dad played football so the sons or daughters play too but not many can be played together at the same time in the same event. You won't see two or three generations playing in an AFL or NRL Grand Final but you will see this at a national shooting championship.

We have juniors now competing as adults with their own children waiting to be of age to gain a permit. We have grandparents, husbands, wives and now their sons and daughters on the line with everyone competing equally. Mums who shot while pregnant are now at the range

with our current crop of juniors who grew up together, played together and are now old enough to compete against each other, winning or placing in grades and even putting pressure on their sponsors who are, of course, their parents.

They spot and score, compete and learn the craft and sportsmanship to participate and contribute, they follow the rules and become good shooting ambassadors while making friends from all walks of life and generally just enjoying the many benefits which come from being outdoors. Our eldest logged his Learner Driver hours by travelling from New South Wales to Perth for National Championships and our youngest is looking forward to doing the same this year as we travel as a Silhouette family. So if you've ever wondered what might be a great family pastime that's multi-generational then come and try the shooting sports. Come and try Rifle Metallic Silhouette. Find out more at saa.org.au under 'Disciplines'.

• Sharon MacDonald is a member of SSAA Parkes, NSW. ●

National firearms registry back in the spotlight

Media and Politics Officer Rachael Oxborrow

In the wake of tragic events involving the illegal use of firearms in Queensland late last year, Australia's leaders have committed to a "nationally co-ordinated approach to the management of firearms" which would improve co-operation between jurisdictions, these comments made by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese following a meeting of the National Cabinet in early February.

The series of events which led to this announcement occurred in rural Queensland in December and resulted in tragic loss of life. As predictably happens when elected leaders attempt to address public fears where firearms are involved in high-profile criminal incidents, commitment to changes in firearm laws followed. The chorus was made up of the usual anti-civilian firearm ownership groups and was joined by state and territory Premiers and Police Ministers.

While initially these calls were focused on demanding changes to firearm laws in general, it became clear there was more to the story of the perpetrators and there may have been failures or limitations in the system which contributed to the situation. The tune of the conversation changed to a perceived need for a national firearms registry that would allow police from all jurisdictions to access firearms licensee details with more ease than they can currently.

The Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (SSAA National) initially respected the loss of life by delaying any comment in the wake of what may be considered an act of domestic terrorism in our nation's history. In the weeks that followed, SSAA National made a small-scale statement as discussions turned political. Prime Minister Albanese said in December there wouldn't be a review involving changing the nature of firearm laws, rather an investigation of a national firearms registry should be considered by National Cabinet in early 2023.

In response, SSAA National cautiously welcomed a metered approach to the situation by the PM but also questioned the acceptance and utilisation of the existing Australian Firearms Information Network

(AFIN), introduced after the 2014 Lindt Café siege in Sydney to bring together registry data from all jurisdictions. The creation of AFIN was hindered by delays and consistency issues and it appears this database may not be fit for purpose.

SSAA National also renewed calls for reinstatement of the Federal Government's Commonwealth Firearms Advisory Council that would create a formal working group of key firearms community stakeholders to offer informed advice and consultation. In the lead-up to February's National Cabinet meeting, ABC's daily current affairs TV program 7.30 approached SSAA National to provide a viewpoint on behalf of licensed firearm owners. Filmed interviews with this writer as well as SSAA (WA) President Paul Fitzgerald were conducted by ABC over several hours and resulted in around 30 seconds of footage being aired.

The concern would be (something expressed by both myself and Paul during interview) is if a national firearms registry introduction progressed to a national set of firearm laws, how would these be determined? We know laws don't deter criminals from acting illegally with unlicensed firearms and ultimately legislation of this type will predominantly impact licensed firearm owners who follow the letter of the law. As this situation develops SSAA National will continue to communicate with the Federal Government and update membership as appropriate.

WA Government flags mental health checks

Shortly after the National Cabinet's announcement of calls for a National Firearm Registry which already exists via the Australian Firearms Information Network (AFIN), the Western Australian Government revealed yet another tactic in its agenda to remove firearms from civilian ownership. This time WA Police Minister Paul Papalia blindsided a number of key communities in that state by committing to mandatory mental health checks for all new and existing firearm licence holders as a part of its review of the WA Firearms Act announced in March 2022.

Minister Papalia has shown his contempt for WA shooters in the past, most notably through the release of a detailed map revealing 89,000 firearm owners' addresses and creating a media spectacle by demonstrating a .50 calibre BMG military rifle, implying it's readily available. Importantly, the firearm was discharged on a non-SSAA range not designed for this calibre of rifle as a legal option. Details of the mandatory mental health checks are non-existent and so far haven't been shared, while references to this proposal being in the interests of public safety have no tangible proof of concept attached.

SSAA (WA) President Paul Fitzgerald has rejected the measures as ill-conceived, nonsensical and has highlighted shared concerns this concept will put key health services in the state at risk. SSAA (WA) supports the safe and legal use of firearms for recreational shooting and competition use and will continue to call into question the failure of the State Government to consult with key stakeholders, particularly with respect to mental health services in WA.

In response to this and many other over-reaching proposals in the rewrite of the WA Firearms Act, Mr Fitzgerald and WA Firearm Traders Association (WAFTA) President Bevan Steele have participated in multiple media interviews representing the views of our licensed and law-abiding firearm owners in the west. Efforts are now being coordinated to firm-up cohesion across the firearms industry, farming groups and presenting a show of strength to the WA Government that this section of the community will not tolerate being strong-armed into submission. ●



Lunchtime card trick with a bolt-action BSA

Donald Mackintosh shop window at 400 Bourke Street pre-1920.

There was a time when Melbourne shooters were spoilt for choice with Latrobe Street in the CBD featuring two of the city's major gunshops. Drawing on decades of personal experience, Lionel Swift recalls time well spent in what could be argued was a golden age for firearms in Australia.

Mackintosh Gunshop, 192 Latrobe St
Donald Mackintosh originally opened a gunshop at 400 Bourke St and some years later moved the business to 192 Latrobe St, just west of the corner of Swanson and Latrobe, this eventually taken over by Horrie James and Miss Olham, long-time employees of the founder. The Latrobe St business continued to be well patronised under James, a skilled competition shooter and astute businessman and when he retired the business moved to Elizabeth St under the management of Miss Olham but was there for only a few years before being

taken over by Alcock & Pierce.

This article concerns my personal visits in the 1950s. When that decade began I started a trade course and spent one day a week at RMIT (then Royal Melbourne Technical College) and every lunchtime visited two or three of the many gunshops in the city centre. Mackintosh's was closest to RMIT and was therefore the one I frequented most often.

CBD exhibition shooting

It should be appreciated it was common until the 1960s for low-powered rifles and

handguns to be tested by live firing in many gunshops and I recall being given a personal demonstration of trick shooting in 1952 by Horrie James at the counter of his Donald Mackintosh shop in Latrobe St (he'd become an apprentice gunmaker to Donald Mackintosh, then owner and manager, eventually inheriting the business when he retired).

The trick was cutting a playing card at about 20ft (6m) having bent the card at right angles and, holding a then-new 15-shot BSA bolt-action offhand, he cut the card (the bullet was caught by a block of pine-wood). I was suitably impressed and bought the rifle but being only 16 later learned it wasn't difficult and the 'trick' was the .22 bullet is much wider than the thickness of a playing card, allowing for any small error of 'windage' at that short distance. And the 2½" width of the card (height of the 'target')

Lunchtime card trick with a bolt-action BSA

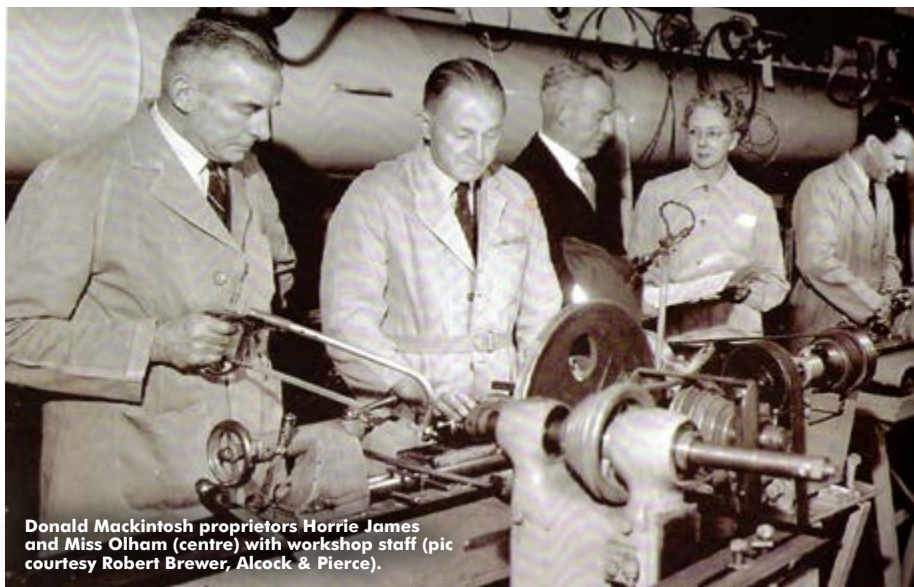
made elevation irrelevant. When I learned this a few years later I performed the trick for friends - not indoors - who were amazed until they too duplicated it.

Horrie James was considered an expert on firearms and ammunition and was often called on by police to give forensic advice on these. He was also a confidante of the top echelon of the ICI ammunition company management and designed a game cartridge for them which carried his shooting nom de plume Duxbac. The cartridge became extremely popular and, incidentally, shooting under an assumed name was common practice for pre- and immediate post-World War II competition shooters.

Mackintosh the man

Having outlined the Mackintosh gunshop it's pertinent to include some interesting information on its founder. Donald Mackintosh was born in Rockbank, Victoria in 1866 and died at his Essendon home in 1951 and between these dates was very successful in several fields. He was an excellent shot and participated in events around Australia as well as the highly competitive European trap shooting scene. He joined Baccus Marsh Gun Club at age 10, winning their championship that year before moving to Melbourne Gun Club in 1889 and quickly achieving the maximum 30-yd (27m) handicap which he retained for the rest of his life.

He won the first clay target event in Australia despite having only previously shot live birds (as had all shooters until then) and competed in live bird competitions usually three times a week, often spending two days hunting quail and was reputed to have trained a pet fox to work as a 'gun dog' pointing quail. Some of his international



Donald Mackintosh proprietors Horrie James and Miss Olham (centre) with workshop staff (pic courtesy Robert Brewer, Alcock & Pierce).

successes include winning the London Gun Club Cup three times, the Grand Prix at Monte Carlo and several other Grands Prix, the Belgian Championship and being named 'World Champion' by the Paris *Jockey*, a sporting journal of the day.

His son, also Donald, died of measles in Europe aged five while his father was competing there, which caused him to return home and curtail his competitive shooting. He lost the sight in one eye while in Europe and this was eventually replaced with an artificial one. When he opened a gunshop in Melbourne on his return from Europe he imported several top brands of English shotguns including W.W. Greener, William Cashmore, Boswell and Hollis and while his competitive shooting activity declined his skill did not and he gave an exhibition in 1922 for the Rockbank library, making a 100-break using clay targets for the first time.

Shooters Supplies, Latrobe St east

This was the second gunshop in Latrobe St, at the eastern end, and was opened in the 1950s by the Lansell brothers, George and Rache, the former a technical expert and Rache more of a 'money man'. They employed some talented technical staff including gunsmith Jack Millar who became well known for his rifle barrels and custom rifles and also 'imported' skilled toolmakers from Austria including Frank Schlemmit and his nephew John. Jack was an enthusiastic member of the Essendon branch of the Miniature Ranges Union which used low velocity .22 target ammunition on week-nights with little noise and no complaints in the middle of suburbia just 6.5km from the CBD. It was a building on leased land at the

end of Ascot Vale station and I joined when I was 16 (other 'miniature ranges' were located adjacent to several other suburban rail stations).

I still have a Manton 14-gauge muzzle-loading shotgun I bought privately from Jack as I was then a poor apprentice unable to afford fixed shotgun ammunition at the seemingly outlandish price of 12s/6d for a box of 25 x 12g cartridges. Muzzleloading lore and advice came with the gun for 75 shillings as Jack had owned it since he too was an apprentice. I still have it and three of my sons long ago also learned the art of muzzleloading with it.

Another interesting point about Jack is he served as a motor mechanic apprentice to his father in their well-equipped backyard workshop in Moreland where, after hours, he pursued his hobby of gunsmithing, turning it into a full-time business after his father retired and continuing there after the demise of Shooters Supplies.

Associated ammo factory

The Lansell brothers also established a successful ammo-making business called Super Cartridge Company. It was based in Maribyrnong Road and the Austrian specialists and another skilled worker, Bob Ornsby, were transferred from Shooters Supplies to Maribyrnong to help establish this enterprise. The factory was housed in a former 'Nissan' or 'Quonset' hut, a hangar-like construction method developed during WWII.

The Super Cartridge Company specialised in converting .303 military brass into .22 and .25 'Sprinter' rounds, providing the first Australian-made high velocity centrefire ammunition and also made sporting .303,



Donald Mackintosh with one of his hundreds of trophies.

DONALD MACKINTOSH, Gunmaker,

Melbourn, 22/7/18.

To Donald Mackintosh,
490 Dorcas Street, Melbourne.

Dear Sir,—I had no proof of the Gun you chose for me nearly four years ago, and until the other day, when I sent it in to you for a top lever spring, had never cast my eye on it for repairs, and considering the lot of shooting it was doing, shows what a good judge's opinion is in the matter of choosing a gun. Below is its record in championship; the list of open events are too many to write up.

- 1910.—Commonwealth Sparrow Championship. J. Grant, 1st;
- W. Grant, 2nd.
- 1911.—Commonwealth Sparrow Championship. W. Grant, 1st.
- 1912.—Commonwealth Pigeon Championship. W. Grant, 1st;
- W. Grant, 2nd; T. Grant, 3rd.
- 1912.—Victoria Pigeon Championship. W. Grant, 1st;
- 1912.—Victoria Sparrow Championship. W. Grant, 1st; T. Grant, 2nd.
- 1911.—Commonwealth Starling Championship. W. Grant, 1st.
- 1912.—New South Wales Pigeon Championship. W. Grant, 1st.
- 1912.—Commonwealth Sparrow Championship. W. Grant, 1st.
- 1911.—Commonwealth Pigeon Championship. W. Grant, 1st.
- 1911.—Commonwealth Starling Championship. W. Grant, 1st.
- 1911.—Hedgic Championship. T. Grant, 1st.

P.S.—The gun has won every championship it has shot in, which, I believe, must be a record.

Yours faithfully,

W. B. GRANT.



WILLIAM CASHMORE'S MATCH GUN.

No. 13.—WILLIAM CASHMORE'S MATCH GUN. 12 gauge, double barreled, hammerless, breech loading gun, fitted with Anson and Doble action and W. W. Greener's crossbolt, steel barrels, chambered for 2 1/2 in. cases, and specially regulated for pigeon shooting, with automatic safety, angle-tuned rib, half-pistol grip, specially recommended for trap shooting, with closing set complete. Price, £32 10s.; Export, £38 10s. Carriage in Victoria, 2/- extra; other States, 3/- extra.

Melbourne.

13

DONALD MACKINTOSH, Gunmaker.



No. 10.—HOLLIS, hammerless, with Greener crossbolt, set the rest rib, steel barrels, 30 in., Anson and Doble action, nitro proof, 2 1/2 in. chamber, automatic safety, neatly finished throughout. £32 10s.



No. 11.—BY W. W. GREENER, of Birmingham. Hammerless, double barreled, breech loading, 12 gauge gun, steel barrels, dual-level engine-tuned rib, Greener wedge-fast bolt, independent safety (side) action, well-stocked and half-pistol grip, chambered for 2 1/2 in. cases, plain finish. A gun to rely upon for any class of work. £37 15s., with closing set complete. Carriage in Victoria, 3/- extra; in other States, 3/- extra.



No. 12.—W. W. GREENER, HAMMERLESS, MATCH GUN, specially built for high shooting needs. See balance, fully regulated, facile primary action, steel barrels, 30 in., chambered for 2 1/2 in. cases, dual-level engine-tuned rib, independent side safety half-pistol head, fall-out chokes in left, and right barrel modified chokes if desired. Fine finish. Price, £33 10s. Carriage in Victoria, 2/-; other States, 3/-, with closing set complete.

Melbourne.

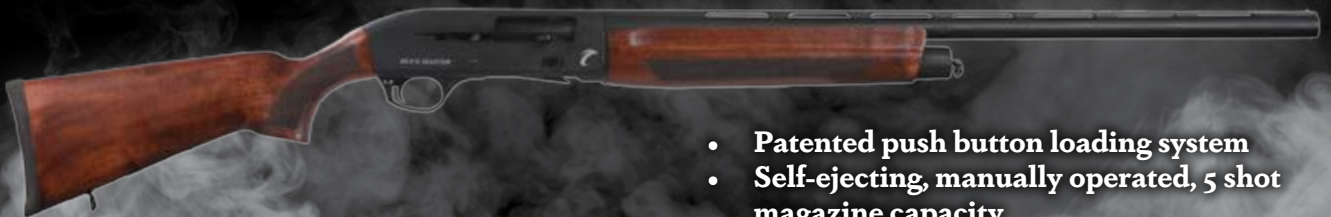
12

.310 and .22 Hornet ammunition as well as the first all-plastic bodied 12g shotshells in Australia, which they loaded with shot from their own shot-making equipment. This was a low-level production system which avoided the need for a tower drop and the same system was later used in Australia by Winchester at Geelong but subsequently abandoned when they sourced their shot from Ballantine (Champion Cartridges). This may have been down to cost though they certainly obtained a higher-grade product from Ballantine's tower.

Unfortunately this all-plastic shotshell production, together with its then fairly new star crimp closure, caused a legal fracas with Winchester long before they started manufacturing ammunition (which has now ceased) in Australia. Star crimping, if I recall correctly, was first used by Remington in the US in the early 1950s along with their striated plastic case, both of which are almost universally used now by manufacturers worldwide. When the Super Cartridge Company closed the factory was used by a high-quality cabinet making business for several years before being demolished, another victim of 'progress'. ●

• Next month: Three old gunshops of Little Collins Street.

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Polaris thermal scope turns up the heat

Bob Boland



As someone comparatively new to shooting, one of the major challenges I have is evaluating gear as every manufacturer claims their product is amazing in both quality and price to the point you'd be foolish not to buy at least one of their items. And when it comes to optics, technology is moving so fast it's tough not just to keep up but to work out what's worth the hype and what's a modest improvement. If you have a large budget then buying only to shelve or resell might be an option though I suspect most shooters have limited funds but big dreams.

So when *Australian Shooter* asked if I was interested in reviewing some thermal scopes I certainly was and when instructed to be totally honest in my evaluation I was thrilled, as I've no interest in writing virtual advertisements. The items in question came from Cono-Tech, a Queensland firm which specialises in thermal optics and they provided four scopes which allowed me to compare the significant features of their Polaris range.

Each comes well packaged in a black hard case with custom foam, instructions, four batteries and a charger. Out of the box and without even using the rubber eye relief (of which there are two) the scopes were amazingly clear and powerful. I could pick out

Angus cattle distinctly at 700m and not just see them but patently make out features such as eyes and ears and with the digital zoom, identifying a 2" plate at 500m was a breeze.

I showed the scopes to an ADF Afghanistan veteran who was impressed and said that while the Polaris don't compare to military-issue gear, they are indeed amazing. In fact my research into thermal scopes showed Polaris aren't even top-of-the-line civilian scopes, yet they're so good I don't see why you'd want to buy a more expensive model. In terms of system the Polaris scopes screw on to a supplied Picatinny rail (which could be adapted for a weaver rail) with quick release cams. I was puzzled as to why I'd need to quickly swap a thermal scope until I realised this is a great safety feature, specifically allowing the shooter to scan an area without pointing a firearm at anything not 'shootable'.

Having a thermal monocular and thermal scope would be ideal but the quick release means these scopes can do double duty, a significant cost saver. Additionally, a single Polaris can be given multiple zeros so it could be easily moved between different rifles. Indeed they held the zero between being taken on and off and the rail and cam system proved rock solid, even when

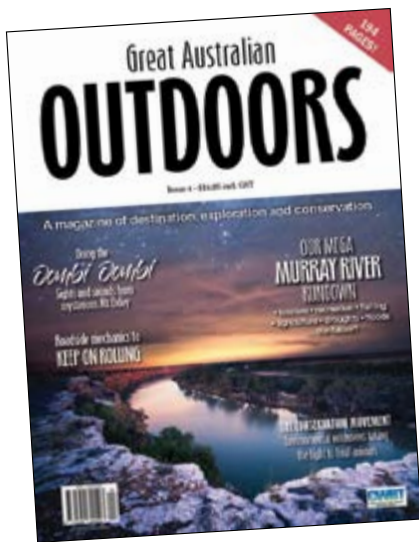
firing magnum calibres. The Polaris with built-in rangefinders can be zeroed at three or more distances and you then use this data to automatically adjust point of aim depending on the rangefinder reading, a great feature which significantly improves accuracy. Indeed the electronics overall are spectacular and include a variety of colours, the ability to record video (not audio) and download footage as well as the previously mentioned electronic zoom.

Two batteries are mounted in a rear compartment accessed by a thumb screw lock, again easy to open even wearing gloves, yet battery life is so good I doubt changing them in the field would be a regular task. More importantly the controls are a simple joystick on the left and again this was easy to operate with gloves on. I even used the controls wearing heavy welding gloves without any problems so even in cooler weather the scope functions beautifully.

Having been so fulsome in my praise it's worth mentioning the three weaknesses I found in these Polaris scopes. Firstly the Picatinny rails are aluminum which does reduce weight (the scopes themselves aren't heavy) but means over time and being taken on and off, they'll wear faster than steel. Secondly, I found some of the screws which attach the scope to the rail

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Polaris thermal scope turns up the heat

The rail and lens cap on the Polaris.



Slight rust detected along the mechanism.

were slightly rusted despite being painted though they were from a previously tested unit. Rust suggests the screws are high carbon steel which is prone to such corrosion and in conjunction with the aluminum rails there's real potential for galvanic decay. But rust is an issue for most firearms and the answer is to dry them if they get wet, then opt for dry storage after wiping down with WD-40 or similar.

The third and final minus was lens caps on three of the scopes were hinged and unlike the rest of the unit looked breakable. The 650RL had a rubber cover which I much preferred but hard cases mean the only time a lens cover could break would be in the field, perhaps moving in heavy cover or if dropped. So with care this weakness is not profound, I just wish the designers had gone with rubber covers for all scopes.

Overall I've no hesitation in highly endorsing the Polaris thermal scope range and as I had the privilege of testing four different models, I can make some

comparisons. If your budget can stretch I highly recommend a 50mm lens/640-pixel unit with integrated rangefinder (650RL) which also features my preferred rubber lens cap. If buying on price alone the value for money option is the 50mm/384-pixel unit without rangefinder (350R not tested), though seriously consider saving up for the 350RL as a rangefinder is significant and an integrated one means you don't have another piece of gear to manage. If I could have either a 35mm lens with rangefinder or 50mm without, I'd go for the 50mm without rangefinder (350RL or 650RL).

Before making any purchase I'd take time to enjoy Cono-Tech's YouTube channel and even if you're not planning to invest in a thermal scope, I advise having a look at their videos. My final suggestion is to not simply order online but call the team at Cono-Tech as I found them incredibly knowledgeable, wonderfully helpful and their range is significantly bigger than just the four options mentioned here. ●



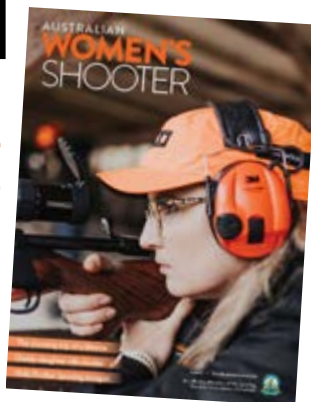
Polaris case interior with all contents packed.

Model	Lens	Integrated rangefinder	Price	Comment
335R	35mm	No	\$3499	Best value thermal scope in the review.
350RL	50mm	Yes	\$4349	Great scope with rangefinder, worth the additional money.
635R	35mm	No	\$4999	Great field of view but no rangefinder.
650RL	50mm	Yes	\$6099	Best thermal scope in the review.

What's in Issue 18

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S SHOOTER

Editor, Gemma Dunn, accepts an invite from Beretta Australia to attend Sako's 2022 Press Event in Helsinki, which ends in an epic moose hunt.



DADDY-DAUGHTER DUO

Scott Heiman earnestly prepares for a pair of significant family milestones with two rifle-builds for himself and his daughter.

TURKISH DELIGHT

John McDougall tests and reviews the stunning revamp of a popular Yildiz ProStar Sporting shotgun.

Issue 18 inside members' Australian Shooter this month and online at ssaa.org.au/women

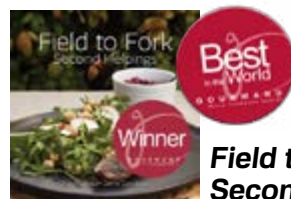




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National

Handgun Metallic Silhouette National Postal Shoot

March 1-May 31, 2023

All SSAA HMS ranges

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

SSAA Gallery Rifle National Championships

March 18-19, 2023

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

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

April 5-10, 2023

Southern Districts Rifle Club, Bedfordale, WA
Program: April 5: Practice. April 6: NRA 3x40, 10m Scoped Air Rifle - Precision. April 7: Field Rifle Centrefire, 10m Scoped Air Rifle - 3P. April 8: Scoped 3P Rimfire. April 9: Field Rifle Rimfire, shooters' dinner and presentation in the evening. April 10: Scoped 3P Centrefire.

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

SSAA Muzzleloading National Championships

April 6-10, 2023

Wanneroo Shooting Complex, Pinjar, WA
Program: Thursday, April 6: Practice day. Extensive program, see National website for full event list. Facilities: Limited catering only, limited camping and caravan sites, showers. Presentation dinner on April 10. Contact: Bob Boyd 0417 953 257 or Robertjboyd@bigpond.com

SSAA Benchrest Centrefire National Championships

April 7-10, 2023

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

Rifle Metallic Silhouette National Championships

April 7-11, 2023

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

Lever Action Silhouette National Championships

April 13-16, 2023

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

SSAA Benchrest Rimfire National Championships

April 13-16, 2023

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

Sporting Shotgun National Championships

May 13-14, 2023

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

Shotgun 5-Stand National Championships

May 20-21, 2023

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

Qld

Queensland NRA Pistol Metallic Silhouette Postal Shoot

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

SSAA (Qld) Gallery Rifle State Championships

April 1-2, 2023

SSAA Clermont, Qld
Program: April 1 - 50m Precision, Multi-Target, Timed & Precision 1, 1500 Match. April 2 - 1020 Match in Classic and Open Class. Facilities: Camping with showers, canteen, breakfast and lunch both days and dinner on Saturday (meals cost extra). Contact: Don Robinson 0428 986 070 or Lloyd Marteene 0429 831 052.

SSAA (Qld) Combined Services Postal Shoot

January 1-April 10, 2023

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

SSAA (Qld) Long Range Precision State Championships

May 26-29, 2023

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

SA

SSAA (SA) Field Rifle, 3-P, Scoped Air Rifle and NRA Any Sight State Championships

March 11-12, 2023

Para Range, Greenwith, SA
Program: March 11: Field Rifle Rimfire, Field Rifle Centrefire. March 12: 3-P Rimfire, 3-P Centrefire. Facilities: Canteen, light meals, snacks, tea, coffee,

drinks all day. Camping on range with showers, toilets and power. Contact: Paul Rawlings 0403 436 905.

SSAA (SA) Muzzleloading and Black Powder Cartridge Rifle State Championships

March 18-19, 2023

Gorge Road, Castambul, SA
Program: March 18: 200m Class 3 (Open) Benchrest Rifle, 200m Class 3 (Open) Prone Rifle, 50m Open Musket, 50m Lever Action Rapid Fire, 50m Class 1 (Military Rifle) or Class 2 (Traditional Round Ball) Offhand, 50m Class 4 (Flintlock Rifle) Offhand, 50m Any Muzzleloader or Black Powder Cartridge Rifle Shot in any position but benchrest, 50m Class 3 (Open) Offhand (Vetterli) 16:30pm. March 19: 100m Class 1 (Military Rifle) Benchrest, 100m Class 1 (Military Rifle) Prone, 100m Class 2 (Traditional Round Ball) Benchrest, 100m Class 2 (Traditional Round Ball) Cross Sticks, 100m Class 3 (Open Rifle) Benchrest, 100m Class 3 (Open Rifle) Prone (Whitworth), 100m Black Powder Cartridge Rifle Benchrest (ASSRA Target). Facilities: Saturday night barbecue, canteen facilities available. Contact: Tim Rogers 0417 498 684.

Tas

SSAA (Tas) Lever Action Silhouette State Championships

March 11-13, 2023

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

Vic

SSAA (Vic) Single Action State Championships

March 9-13, 2023

Eagle Park Range, Little River, Vic
Program: March 9: R.O.2 Course. March 10: Long Range Rifle: Wild Bunch R.O. Course; R.O.1 Course; Wild Bunch (four stages) and warm-up stages. March 11: Shooters' briefing followed by four main stages; team event and speed events. March 12: Four main stages; side events. March 13: Four main stages followed by Top Gun shoot-out; presentations. Facilities: Free camping at Eagle Park with limited powered sites, toilets and showers. Contact: Tony Diablo 0419 187 980 diablo6@bigpond.com or Buck Silverton 0423 052 942 bucksilverton@outlook.com

SSAA (Vic) 5-Stand Shotgun State Qualifier

March 25, 2023

SSAA Wodonga Range, Victoria
Program: 100 targets, first round (must do both rounds to qualify for state team). Facilities: Canteen and clubrooms. Contact: Josh Knight 0488 970 293.

SSAA (Vic) Shotgun State Championship and Qualifier

March 25-26, 2023

SSAA Shepparton, Victoria
Program: 200 targets over two days (100 each day), four rounds each day (must do both rounds to qualify for state team). Facilities: Camping available. Contact: Geoff Morton 0417 337 494.

SSAA (Vic) Combined Services State Championships

March 31-April 2, 2023

Eagle Park Range, Victoria

Program: March 30: Practice, March 31: 500m Deliberate, April 1: 3P Core, 300m Deliberate, 100m Rapid, 200m Snap C, April 2: 310 Cadet and/or .22 Trainer, Mad Minute 100m. Facilities: Military Rifle clubhouse, on-site camping, water, barbecue. Contact: Frank Griffio 0409 316 095.

SSAA (Vic) Junior Rimfire Silhouette State Championships

May 21, 2023
Eagle Park Range, Vic
Program: 9am practice, competition starts 10.10 for 80 shots Rimfire Silhouette. Contact: Mark Butler 0409 135 740.

SSAA (Vic) Scoped Silhouette State Championships May 27-28, 2023

Eagle Park Range, Vic
Program: Saturday 80 shots Centrefire; Sunday 80 shots Rimfire. Contact: Mark Butler 0409 135 740.

SSAA (Vic) Single Action Black Powder State Championships

July 15-16, 2023
Eagle Park Range, Vic
Program: July 15: Long Range, four Single Action main stages, dusk shoot. July 16: Six Single Action main stages, presentation. Facilities: Camping with showers and toilets, limited power, lunch both days, dinner Saturday. Contact: Tony Diablo 0419 187 980 or diablo6@bigpond.com

SSAA (Vic) Lever Action Silhouette State Championships

September 23-24, 2023
Eagle Park Range, Vic
Program: Saturday 80 rifle calibre; Sunday 80 shots pistol calibre then 80 shots smallbore rifle. Contact: Mark Butler 0409 135 740.

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

October 22, 2023
Eagle Park Range, Vic
Program: Centrefire competition followed by Rimfire. Contact: Mark Butler 0409 135 740.

WA

SSAA (WA) Centrefire Benchrest State Championships

May 27-June 5, 2023
Jarrahdale Sporting Shooters, WA
Program: May 27: 300yd Heavy Bench; May 28: Unlimited; June 3: Sporter; June 4: Heavy Bench; June 5: Light Bench. Discipline delegates meeting on June 4. Facilities: No canteen, plenty of camping room with showers, toilets, barbecue facilities, limited power. Contact: Trevor 0417 085 528 benchrestwa@inet.net.au or Dave 0400 205 892 benchrest@jarrahdaleshooters.org.au.

SSAA (WA) Skeet Shotgun State Championships May 28, 2023

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

SSAA (WA) Lever Action State Championships June 2-4, 2023

SSAA Geraldton Branch, WA
Program: June 2: Practice; June 3: 9.30am start; June 4: 9.30am start. Facilities: Camping at range with power and water, canteen facilities, breakfast and lunch can be bought. Contact: Stephen Ellis 0418 388 991 or

leveraction@ssaawa.org.au or Dane Taylor 0407 083 408 or geraldton@ssaawa.org.au

SSAA (WA) Lever Action Silhouette State Championships

July 6-10, 2023
Hedland Sporting Shooters, WA
Program: July 6: Practice. 7: Rifle Lever Action. 8: Pistol Cartridge. 9: Small Bore. WA State team selection will be on top 10 positions. Facilities: Canteen food sales, camping, showers, toilets, barbecue area, limited power; Saturday night meal supplied. Contact: David Brougham 0432 748 703 or clas@inet.net.au.



SSAA 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 National championship events may be subject to border controls and other COVID-19 impacts. In addition to general border closures, many states and territories may prohibit persons from known COVID hotspots. An event may be postponed or cancelled at any time by SSAA National, SSAA State Office or club directive. It is recommended competitors consider any potential

COVID-19 impacts on travel, accommodation plans and insurances etc. SSAA National will not be liable for reimbursement to competitors for any costs associated with a postponed or cancelled SSAA National championship event for any reason, including COVID-19. Competitors planning to attend an event should consider options for free cancellation or refund of travel and accommodation costs where available.



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A plan for all seasons

Across the world there are hunting seasons, regulated periods where hunters may or may not take certain game. These regulations can apply to whole species or things like male or female restrictions, size and bag limits and even mechanisms - rifle, shotgun, dog or bow. Adhering to the ideals of game management, good regulations reflect natural cycles. Game doesn't breed when we say, it breeds in response to hard-wired signals from nature and as humans we use things like the calendar to anchor these signals and the actions they lead to.

Take for instance red deer in Queensland. If you're a red deer hunter you've got a week in late March to early April circled in your diary and might even count down the days to that week. Either way, you'll use the calendar to help make your dreams of taking a double-six stag a reality, as how else will you let family and work know when you'll be off hunting? But if you give a thought to the history of red deer in Queensland you realise the calendar isn't so important and here's what I mean.

It's the 1800s, you're a red deer stag and Queen Victoria decides you'd make a great gift. Next minute you're in a box, loaded on a sailing ship and nine months later you're pushed out into the wilds of south-east Queensland. Soon enough you begin a new breeding season which is, by the calendar, about 180 days out of whack with a cycle your species has followed since the end of the Ice Age and all without a sundial, timetable or updating an App.

Australian hunting regulations are a little hit and miss with duck season possibly the most regulated while there is some focus on seasons even for introduced species like deer and trout, though for the most part regulations are about location and mechanism rather than when we can or can't hunt. Now I've heard plenty say that's a good thing as feral species shouldn't be coddled so let's



Taking time to observe and understand behaviour puts you in a better position when hunting.

whack 'em and stack 'em, until recently I heard a different take on it.

A hunter whose opinion I value greatly spoke of some of the benefits of regulations he observed while guiding overseas. It was his opinion the inherent limitations created through regulation forced hunters to become more knowledgeable about the game they pursued, as their success depended on it. Now you can't really compare the Australian experience with other places - too many differences, not enough similarities, no discernible baseline - yet in real terms it is what it is and not worth arguing about.

So if we throw away the idea of regulation and concentrate on the outcome, is there a benefit for us as hunters to understand and act in response to seasons and cycles of game? Unequivocally the answer is yes as it makes us better. People often ask me where's the best place to hunt within a particular forest and I answer with these three follow-up questions.

1: What are you hunting? 2: When are you going? 3: What are the conditions like? The reason is if you know your species, you under-

stand fundamentals like shot placement. If you take into consideration when you're hunting, you'll have a better idea of the type of game you'll encounter and if you consider the prevailing conditions, you're more likely to position yourself where the game is.

Talk to professional shooters and trappers and you'll soon realise they know their game. For them it's all about minimising cost while maximising results and you don't achieve that by throwing down a trap or aimlessly driving around a paddock. Pro shooters and trappers are attuned to the ebbs and flows affecting the target species as their bank balance depends on it.

Another benefit comes when arguing with the anti-gun brigade, one of my favourite pastimes. What I've observed with the anti's is once you get past 'I don't like hunting/I don't like guns', they know little about firearms and absolutely nothing about game. Incredibly this lack of knowledge isn't just reserved for the amateur anti, as how many times has a group of 'experts' called for the immediate destruction of a species then called for the immediate cessation of operations when they see the unintended consequences? To the hunter these unintended consequences were inevitable as shoot a species when it's carrying young and what you have are lots of orphaned newborns soon to be hit by cars, caught in fences and chewed on by predators.

So where to from here? It's about learning. If we don't have formal mechanisms to educate, we must teach and learn among ourselves. Read, observe, ask questions, take notes, make mistakes, celebrate wins, practise, develop, mature and improve. Then having done that we share, coach, mentor and introduce others to hunting and shooting.

Most importantly recognise and act in tune with cycles and seasons to make you a more sophisticated hunter.





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HERE'S WHAT SSAA MEMBERS FIREARMS PROTECTION CAN COVER:

Claims Settled Promptly

Firearms & Accessories.

All privately owned firearms registered to the member and fixed accessories.

Coverage.

- Accidental loss and damage of the equipment (including whilst in use, excluding chipping and scratching of stock).
- Malicious damage.
- Collision or overturning of the vehicle.
- Fire & extraneous perils.
- Flood
- Theft.

Not Covered.

Theft where the equipment was not stored in an approved gun safe as required by State or Territory authority, other than when the equipment is in use or away from the member's premises. Where the member or any person or entity to whom the equipment has been entrusted to fails to comply with any law relating to storage, use or handling of the equipment.

Any commentary provided in the advertisement is general information which does not take into account your individual situation and you should consider SSAA Mutual's Financial Services Guide and Statement of Protection (www.ssaib.com.au) before deciding to become a member and to purchase and hold discretionary protection issued by SSAA Mutual Limited. ACN 655 675 862