

National Firearms Agreement a long-term work in progress

AUSTRALIAN

May 2023
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Shooter

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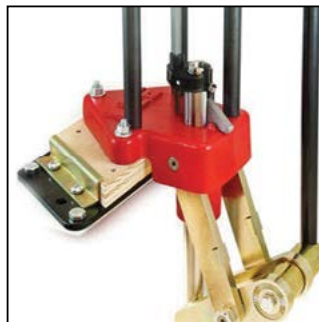
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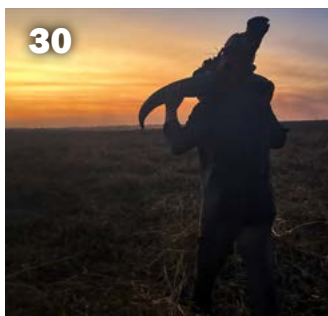
Our May cover - see page 22

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The Australian-inspired Wild Boar rifle by Tikka is based on the ever-popular T3x platform and is a lightweight stalking rifle designed purely with Australian pig hunters in mind, providing a fast-handling, slick-cycling rifle with 10-shot capacity. As our reviewer noted: "The Wild Boar shouldered and cycled beautifully with that extra magazine capacity providing peace of mind."

Leon Wright recalls his early shooting days when fox whistles, duck calls and the odd quail call were the only ones available. He never goes hunting without some sort of game call whether chasing foxes or even sambar deer and says if you're a new hunter looking to improve your chances, then think seriously about game calls.

If you remember our SSAA/Beretta Australia custom rifle build project from last year, next month Mark van den Boogaart will tell the tale of how he and Gemma Dunn took their respective custom rifles on a successful hunt at a private property in the Bathurst area of New South Wales in search of deer and feral pigs.





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Government looking to fast-track National Register

Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus and Australia's Police Ministers are driving the implementation of a National Firearms Register with an air of urgency. Following a meeting in early April, the Attorney-General's Department released a public consultation paper inviting comments on "the key capabilities and benefits a Register could provide for law enforcement, government regulators and the public".

The concept of a Register was raised in late 2022 following a horrific act of domestic terrorism. Elected leaders from around the country predictably called for a firearm law review to address the public outcry, until it became clear there was more to the story of the perpetrators and system failings may have contributed to the tragic events. A National Cabinet meeting of Premiers and the Prime Minister confirmed moves towards a Register in February and plans appear to be progressing quickly.

In the days following the announcement of a public consultation paper, the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia's Media and Politics Officer, Rachael Oxborrow, spoke with ABC Brisbane, questioning the motives to push through a Register in this way and provide a snapshot into firearm ownership in Australia.

The concern SSAA National continues to have is whether calls for a National Firearms Register would involve changes and negatively impact us as law-abiding licensed firearm owners. The upgrades required to bring state and territory registries to standard and who'll be funding this process is another elephant in the room which needs addressing. For more on SSAA National's submission to the Attorney-General's Department, turn to Page 56.

In news on the home front, the SSAA disciplines are ramping up to include international teams and host world class events in Australia. In August, SSAA Mickett Creek Shooting Complex in the Northern Territory will welcome the eighth International Big Game Rifle | Dangerous Game Shoot. This is a great chance for Australian-based members and shooters from overseas to visit the Northern Territory where there are outstanding opportunities for hunting game including buffalo, banteng, wild boar, scrub bull and various deer species not found in other parts of the country.

It's great to see our disciplines and international counterparts getting back into the swing of things, so to check the calendar for your favourite discipline visit www.ssaa.org.au/disciplines



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Back from the dead

I READ WITH great interest Leon Wright's article in your October 2022 edition on 'The Loma' knife and thought you might be interested in a knife I have with quite a story attached. My father had it on our dairy and pig farm at Moogerah in the Boonah district of south-east Queensland. I've no idea where he got it but he used it to cut pumpkins for the pigs to eat, not very glamorous but it served its purpose admirably.



The interesting part begins when a Swedish teenager arrived to work for my father around 1956. He was a merchant seaman who'd jumped ship in Brisbane and somehow obtained my parents' details and contacted them seeking work. My mother's family had a strong Norwegian heritage and I suspect he'd been given our name by some Scandinavian connection.

So Oula arrived and one of his jobs was feeding the pigs and he used this knife to cut pumpkins. He worked for a couple of months then returned to sea but unknown to us he'd taken the knife as a keepsake as he'd formed an attachment to my parents (I don't think dad even missed it).

Imagine my parents' surprise when they received a phone call from Oula 20 years later asking to visit. He was now a successful businessman and in Australia on holiday and their surprise was complete when he arrived with his wife and produced the knife complete with a ribbon! My parents have long since passed on and I inherited the knife which appears very similar to 'The Loma' but with a maker's mark 'Latham & Owen' and the name 'Sergeant' along with the words 'Sheffield, Eng'. Hopefully someone can shed some light as the knife is well over 70 years old.

Archie Tait, Qld

HERE'S A PHOTO of my grand-daughter Ella who loves coming to our house and dragging out my back copies of *Australian Shooter*. It's a while away yet but I reckon she's looking good to be the next generation of shooters in our family.



Kevin Byrne, via email

Evans & Balfour clarification

On Page 36 of last month's magazine in Lionel Swift's article 'Little piece of history', Kevin Sharp has asked to clarify some of the information as follows:

My father Dick, not me, started as a trainee gunsmith with Evans & Balfour of Little Collins St in 1947 under the guidance of two established gunsmiths, Joe Harle and Eddy Garnett. When dad bought the workshop in 1976 or '77 from Evans & Balfour, I started my training with him.

Eventually we built a new workshop at Coldstream where dad continued working until his retirement. I relocated the business to Bairnsdale just over six years ago, retaining most of my customers Australia-wide and meeting a lot of new faces, keeping the original business name of R.E. Sharp and Sons Gunsmiths.

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Don't delay when it comes to membership renewal

Leaving it late to renew your SSAA membership and associated SSAA Firearms Protection service could mean in the event of a covered loss you won't have protection and be at risk. SSAA General Insurance Brokers regularly experiences rejected claims for members who've let their cover lapse previously through the SSAA Firearms Insurance or the new SSAA Firearms Protection by not renewing SSAA membership on time.

The process to receive either type of cover involves members renewing annually with their membership fee. Late renewal results in a period of uninsurance and this will auto-

matically mean any claim during that period is rejected. For example a member who holds SSAA Firearms Insurance and is due to pay their fees on June 1 but doesn't renew until June 14 would leave themselves uninsured for that two-week period. It's amazing how many accidents and incidents happen during this time of uninsurance and the brokerage has seen instances where an accident happens while hunting or at the range and there have even been burglaries and fires in those periods and the member isn't covered.

Renewing membership and paying the \$35 Insurance/Protection fee after the due date and lodging a claim shortly thereafter

doesn't fix the problem. The date and time of renewal is double-checked with the membership office by the insurer on every claim as a standard part of the claims process and lodging false information on a claim form is a criminal offence. The secret is to always renew your SSAA membership on time. Numerous renewal notices and messages are provided by the SSAA Membership office so there's little excuse for late renewal. If SSAA Firearms Insurance or SSAA Firearms Protection are included with your membership it's imperative to renew on time.



Proposed UK trophy ban the thin end of the wedge

The UK has moved closer to implementing a controversial ban on the importing of trophies from thousands of species, after a private member's bill put forward by a Conservative MP and backed by the government received the support of Parliament with MPs across the political divide in favour of the action.

After years of divisive debate since 2019, it seems a high-profile anti-trophy hunting campaign backed by celebrities has trumped considered and rational arguments from many scientists, environmentalists and African community leaders. These same groups are now worried the new laws will inadvertently accelerate the loss of wildlife instead of the claimed protection that's the aim of a ban.

There's no doubt that regulated trophy hunting has assisted in the recovery of black and white rhino populations in Namibia and South Africa. A Namibian representative of the communities of nine southern African countries had met with UK politicians to voice their opposition and explain the real impacts of the proposed ban. All these countries have regulated trophy-hunting regimes and the proposed ban in its existing form would remove financial incentives to protect wildlife without providing an alternative.

A big issue is that Africans, especially in southern Africa, are not being consulted, even though these communities hold the majority of wildlife and are most at risk of habitat loss. Where there's no incentive to conserve wildlife there's the potential to

see substantial areas of land lost to agriculture. Animals which need large ranges such as lions and elephants will be seen differently (resource to a pest) as human-wildlife conflicts increase and that outcome is certainly far from ideal.

Conservation experts have tried to explain the science behind trophy hunting-based conservation models to the UK's Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The head of the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group has reiterated the practice was not driving the extinction of any species. From a scientific perspective the major threats driving species extinctions are habitat loss, poaching and human-wildlife conflict. Trophy hunting can in fact address some of these threats and the evidence around trophy hunting is much more positive than negative. The IUCN, like many others, believes decisions are being made based on politics and emotion rather than science.

This is what you get when so-called celebrities with money, influence and access to millions of followers on social media can make wild statements based on their personal opinions and ideology. These celebrities (as well as the British international environment minister) have ignored local voices and will not visit the communities which stand to be impacted most. There's no ambition to try and understand local perspectives, though maybe that's because these areas don't have the five-star hotels these celebrities are accustomed to.

No wonder some in Southern Africa think this proposed ban is a form of neo-colonialism where the use of economic, political, cultural or other pressures are used to control or influence other countries, especially former dependencies. The UK should be talking to these local communities to ensure their aims to protect endangered species are not having the opposite effect on the ground. It's a sad day when politicians appear to take more notice of social media posts to draft laws than actively participate in thorough evidence-based decision-making.

This proves that it's not just here in Australia where the science behind sustainable use and wildlife conservation is overlooked for what may seem politically popular - and that's definitely not going to help sustain wildlife when the real major threats are ignored.



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How one man became a legend by chance

The Remington Arms Company is one of the oldest and most respected firearms manufacturers in the US. Founded in 1816 by Eliphalet Remington in Ilion, New York the company has been responsible for some of the most iconic firearms in history. From the dependable Model 870 shotgun to the classic Model 700 bolt-action rifle, Remington has provided sportsmen and women around the world with reliable firearms for more than two centuries.

Remington launched himself into the firearms business when he believed he could make a better rifle than those available at the time. He designed and built a flintlock

rifle using a firing mechanism he bought from a gunsmith and a barrel he made himself, then used it to come second in a local shooting match. His well-made gun so impressed other contestants that before he left the field that day, he had so many orders from other competitors he had officially entered the gunmaking business.

One of the company's earliest successes was the Remington Rolling Block rifle which was unveiled in 1866. The Rolling Block was a single-shot used by hunters and soldiers alike and remained in production for more than 50 years, becoming a favourite of sharpshooters during the Spanish-American War. The Rolling Block was followed by another revolutionary design with the Remington Model 8 auto-loading rifle introduced in 1906. The Model 8 was the first commercially successful auto-loading rifle and became popular with early big-game hunters.

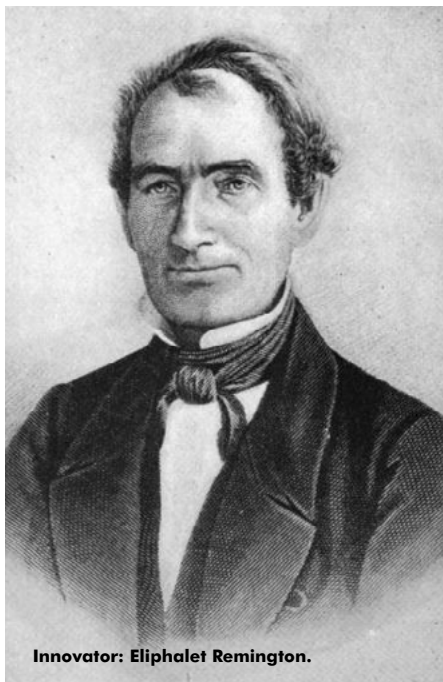
In the early 20th century Remington became known for its shotguns, their Model 31 pump-action being introduced in 1931 and quickly becoming a best-seller. It was followed by the Model 870 pump-action which remains one of the most popular shotguns in the world and has been used by law enforcement agencies and civilians for decades as testament to its quality and innovation.

During World War One the US military turned to Remington to make firearms for the war effort. The company responded by producing the Model 1917 Enfield rifle, based on the British Lee Enfield but modified for use by American soldiers. After World War Two, Remington continued to

introduce new and innovative firearms and in 1962 unveiled the Model 700 bolt-action rifle which swiftly gained a reputation for accuracy and dependability. The Model 700 is still in production today and used by hunters and shooters around the world.

In addition to its hunting and sporting options Remington also produces firearms for law enforcement and military use. The Remington 870 shotgun has been used by police forces for decades and is a favourite of SWAT teams and other tactical units. The company also produces firearms for use by military personnel, including the M24 sniper rifle and M1911 pistol.

Despite its many successes Remington has faced challenges in recent years and in 2018 filed for bankruptcy and was sold to a group of investors, the bankruptcy attributed to declining sales and increased competition from other firearm manufacturers. Yet despite these challenges Remington remains a leader in the firearms industry, its commitment to quality and innovation having helped it survive for more than 200 years. As America's oldest gunmaker Remington has played a pivotal role in the country's history and will continue to be an important part of the firearms industry for years to come.



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Q I need some serious help on an issue I seem to have developed with my vision when I shoot clays. I enjoy all the target disciplines when I get the chance and have had varying degrees of success at achieving reasonable scores over the years. I'm now 65 and the problem I'm having is I seem to have lost the ability to smoothly mount the shotgun to my shoulder and wait a few seconds for my eyes to settle before calling "pull". The only way I can shoot a decent score in any event these days is to just throw the shotgun to my shoulder and call the moment the stock hits my face. Is this normal? I'm at the point of giving up.

Pete Davis, SA

A It's a great question with sadly no definitive answer in my opinion, though as a coach I've had a fair bit of exposure to competitors who've gone down the same path as yourself. I'll start by saying this: There are very few things that should be considered 'normal' among the world's elite shooters when it comes to vision as everyone seems to do things slightly different.

For many people, regardless of what clay target discipline they compete in, once their shotgun is closed and placed in the 'ready' position, which can be either on or off the shoulder depending on the event you're shooting, the tendency is to wait a few seconds for your eyes to settle before calling for the target to be released.

Just how long you wait can depend on many variables from how much time you legally can pause for, such as the time restrictions you may be faced with if com-

peting under Olympic rules, or simply how much strength is required to hold a 4kg shotgun steady before fatigue becomes a factor. I'd suggest most competitors wait for two to four seconds from this 'ready' position, but the real reason to keep steady is to ensure your eyes are positioned correctly to clearly identify the target when it's released. This ideal position will vary from discipline to discipline and, of course, from individual to individual.

What you're doing now is not uncommon. Many people find that as they get older it becomes harder to maintain this 'soft' focus position for too long, as the longer they wait they find their eyes are being drawn back to the end of the barrel. Within no time you're looking at a big red front sight instead of the area beyond where the target's going to be released from.

Focusing clearly on the end of the barrel is a real issue for beginners or anyone who has been brought up shooting an open sight rifle or pistol. All shotgun shooters need to know is where the end of their barrel is, but they don't need to see it clearly as their vision should be locked on the object they're trying to hit as it's propelled through the sky.

There are certainly eye exercises you can try to help train your failing peripheral vision and I recommend you speak to a decent optician if you're deadly serious on improving your shotgun shooting. Yet I wonder if it's as simple as your eye sight starting to fail rather than you simply getting a little older and not having the fast reflexes to react to the speed of the target as you once did?

The method you're describing to shoot targets these days is almost a technique where your weight is propelled forward as you mount the shotgun and I bet your barrel is still in motion as you call for the target. A moving barrel technique is certainly a bona fide approach many great competitors have used over the years, and if you're not seeing targets clearly then this promotes very fast barrel movement which can help overcome some of these problems.

I only ask people to try this technique as a last resort, though I've seen some great results from shooters who've mastered this method. My main concern for anyone trying this is that under pressure there's a tendency to start swinging the barrels faster as your heart rate rises. Before you sell that shotgun, speak to your optician and I'm sure he'll point you in the right direction.



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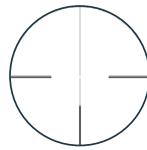


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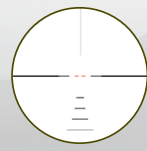


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Q I've been loving the magazine and letters page since I joined the SSAA as a young adult though never thought I'd be writing to tap into this wealth of shooting knowledge, so I hope you can help. My 85-year-old father was given an Oscar Zanano hammer-action shotgun as payment for paying the fare for his brother's wife-to-be from Sicily in 1960. I searched the web and found nothing so have included some photos and look forward to reading what you can come up with.

Tony, via email

A Thanks for your question Tony. The date code XVI reveals your dad's shotgun was made in 1960 by a gunsmith named Luigi Belleri in the village of Ponte Zanano in the Province of Brescia, Lombardy in Italy, a few kilometres south of the famous gun-making and proofing centre of Gardone Val Trompia.

There are apparently several members of the Belleri family from this region who worked for the Beretta factory, also located in Gardone Val Trompia, who made guns under their own names as well, which is where your dad's originated. The inscription 'Acciaic Compresso Vickers' translated to 'Vickers compressed steel' though I haven't been able to 'decode' the acronym 'O.S.C.A.R.' so if any readers can help this would be appreciated.

The BL in an oval I suspect is Luigi Belleri's mark while 'PSF' refers to smokeless powder proof (Pulvere Senza Fumare = powder without smoke). Elsewhere on the gun, apart from the '12' signifying gauge there should be marks to indicate chamber length (typically 70mm) and perhaps chocking. As to its worth, I'd suggest it's a nice family heirloom but not especially valuable to collectors.

Geoff Smith

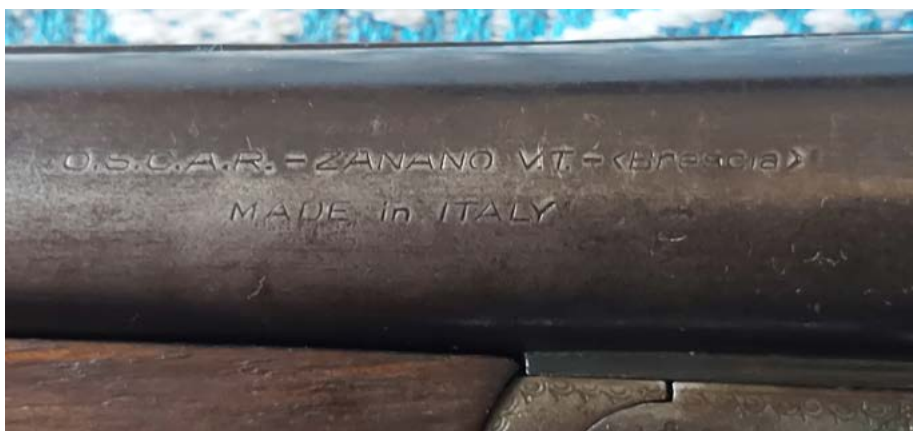
Q I'm interested in having a go at knife-making but unsure where to start. There's a lot of information on YouTube but after a while it all becomes a bit confusing and most of it seems to be aimed at people who want to become better knifemakers rather than someone like me who just wants to know where to start. Can you give me any clues about how or where I can source the information I need?

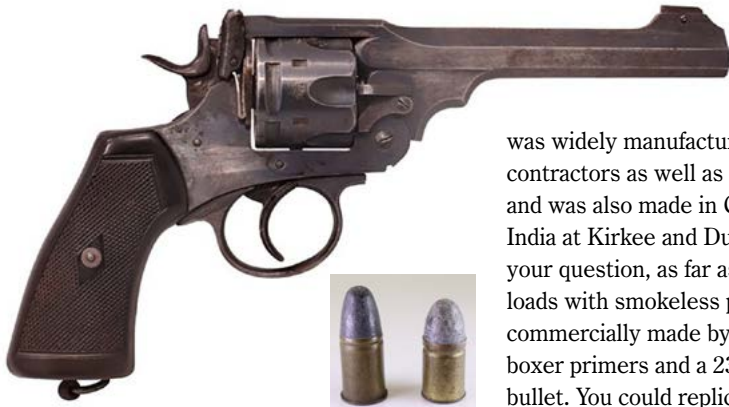
Tom Withers, via email

A There are a number of ways you can find the start you need and, if possible, I recommend you try to book into a knifemakers' course. These are held regularly by some makers and while they're relatively expensive for the time they run (usually over two or three days) they're fairly intensive and participants are taught a lot. Most are based on forging but the skills you learn are also applicable to stock removal (grinding) blanks and blades from flat steel. Search the web for knifemaker courses near you - the ones run by Tharwa Valley Forge (www.tharwavalleyforge.com) and Mother Mountain Forge (www.mothermountainforge.com) are two I recommend.

Alternatively, most knifemakers are happy to share their skills with newcomers so an approach to someone who's already making could be worth a try. Gameco Artisan Supplies (www.artisansupplies.com.au) in Sydney have a wide range of knifemaking materials available including beginner kits which provide everything you need for that first knife as well as directions on how to put them all together. Knifemaking is a particularly satisfying hobby which opens up a whole new world of information and opportunities, requires a wide range of new and different skills and can become something of an obsession. Don't say I didn't warn you!

John Dunn





was widely manufactured by all the British contractors as well as at Royal Laboratory and was also made in Canada, Australia and India at Kirkee and Dum Dum. To answer your question, as far as I know modern loads with smokeless powder are still commercially made by Fiocchi with small boxer primers and a 230-grain round-nosed bullet. You could replicate the original load with a very fast pistol powder such as Alliant Bullseye or ADI AS-30N starting out with 2.5 grains and working up slowly from there. Obviously the size of the primer will depend on which cases you use.

Rod Pascoe

Q I have a CZ 527 American in .22 Hornet which I reload for. The problem is I've been using 40gr .224 projectiles which I now find very difficult to obtain so is it correct that if I start using .223 projectiles the rifle will be less accurate? Any advice appreciated.

Morris Gill, via email

A Your question's a tough one to answer Morris without knowing the condition of the barrel in your rifle, whether it's almost new or well worn, though most likely using .223 projectiles in a rifle which normally takes .224s would result in loss of accuracy as you say. I'd prefer you continue to use .224 projectiles and I notice Cleaver Firearms advertise they have both 36gr and 40gr .224 Barnes projectiles for sale and Horsley Park Gun Shop has Hornady 40gr and 45gr Hornady .224s available, so I suggest you give them a call.

Barry Wilmot

Q Hope you can help. I have an unaltered Webley Mk VI and wish to reload for it as I have brass and projectiles but can't find any info on which powder or weight to use for reloading. I assume large pistol primers would suit (I have both large and small primers). I reload for all my black powder pistols and rifles so have all the gear including dies etc. Can you help?

Keith Illingworth, via email

A Your Webley Mark VI revolver had a short life in service from 1915 to 1920 and accepted the round officially referred to as 'Cartridge S.A. Ball Revolver .455" Mark II' which had been loaded with cordite (early form of smokeless powder) from the 1890s. The .455" Mk II had a drawn brass case about 2.5mm shorter than the Mk I (see photo) with a wide 6mm Berdan primer and round-nosed bullet as opposed to the conical shape of the Mk I. It had one neck cannellure to seat the bullet. The round-nosed bullet weighed 265 grains, was hollow based with three cannellures and the base was lubricated with beeswax.

The propellant charge was between 5.5 and 6.5 grains of chopped Cordite to give a muzzle velocity of 600 feet per second in a 6" barrel. The .455" Mark II ammo

Q I'm new to shotgunning and have attended my first social Sporting Clays shoot and come away with a very sore and bruised right cheek. I'm concerned I'm not doing something right and found it difficult to complete the second round of 25 targets. What should I do to resolve this problem - is it me or my new gun?

Bill, NSW

A Sorry to hear you're being thumped in the cheek, Bill. It's very painful as you say so let's consider some ideas on how to identify the problem and let you enjoy your clay shooting. Generally there are four things which cause this problem. Firstly, the gun is too low in the comb where your cheek rests against it. Secondly, you could be mounting the gun too low or too wide in the shoulder or on your collar bone which really hurts - a triple whammy of gun-mount problems.

The third possibility is you may be 'cheeking' the gun too hard to get your head down and see the sight picture along the rib, which will also have you whacked in the cheekbone. Finally it could be that as a newcomer to shotgunning you're using shells too potent for your stage of shooting and are unconsciously anticipating the recoil and moving your head at the shot. Light-recoiling 28-gram loads are available which will smoke targets and use shells rated around 1250fps as you don't need faster and harder recoiling shells for most clay disciplines.

What I suggest you do is find a knowledgeable friend or club coach who understands this problem and can look at your 'gun fit' to ensure the gun actually fits you and you're mounting it correctly in the first place. This will almost certainly solve the problem and you'll start to really enjoy your clay shooting.

Paul Miller



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



Morgan's warthog is a Hawthorn supporter.

Room with a view

Brad Allen has memories galore in his 'Safari Room'

I feel quite fortunate to have been allowed to 'take over' the formal lounge room of our home as my mancave/trophy room which has been christened the 'Safari Room' by my wife and sons. Indeed one of my mates can only have his mounted deer head collection displayed on the outside deck while several others were relegated to the shed. I know many other hunters who'll never be afforded a similar opportunity, as 'dead zoos' aren't every spouse's cup of tea and being one of three trophy hunters in our home has also meant my two youngest boys have their trophies displayed in their own TV room and bedrooms.

Unfortunately we're actually running out of wall space but I suppose the boys will leave home one day and take their trophies with them, giving me a new blank canvas to decorate with more mounted trophies and

hunting memorabilia. Because my Safari Room is in the centre of the house and I have to walk through it constantly, there isn't a day goes by I don't relive some of the special moments I've experienced during the many hunts it's taken to reach this point. More than one visiting wife of a mate has mentioned they feel uncomfortable with all those eyes gazing down on them and that it's bad feng shui to have so many restless spirits in the house, though we've never experienced any of those feelings.

If anything I have the totally opposite feeling from 'my mates on the walls', as if they're somehow thankful I've taken the time and energy to send them to trophy animal Valhalla. I definitely feel a calm happiness in their presence as I relive those hunts and genuinely thank all of them for their sacrifice. Okay, maybe we're going a bit deep now.

As I look round the trophy room I vividly recall every hunt on each animal displayed, the rifle, scope and load used and distance the respective one was taken at along with shot placement. Every outing taught me more and more about the animals I'm hunting with many lessons learned through mostly those countless happy memories. There's the frustration of those not-so-successful hunts with uncomfortable nights in the bush mostly forgotten in favour of lasting memories made.

Like most mancaves or trophy rooms mounted heads, hides, horns and tusks aren't the only items collected and displayed which have real meaning to their owners. Photographs of my sons and nephew on fishing and hunting trips, firearms and knives in both photo albums and pictures on the wall are all quintessential recollections of enjoyable times past.



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Hunter's mancave

Without doubt my fondest memories aren't necessarily of my own hunts but those of my sons and nephew, as they all started their hunting careers under my tutorage. Being a successful hunter yourself is satisfying enough but being responsible for teaching youngsters to hunt and shoot effectively is eminently more rewarding.

In this day and age with the woke brigade in full flight, many youngsters will never have the chance to experience the satisfaction of learning to safely and efficiently use a firearm or bow, let alone how to hunt and humanely kill and butcher game animals. To put a trophy on the wall or fill the freezer with meat can be a massively satisfying experience, one all my sons and nephew have come to enjoy as a normal part of their lives and I'm pleased to say I played a major role in that. Best of all, in my Safari Room I have the photos to prove it.

I caught the trophy hunting bug from my Uncle Charlie when I was just old enough to fire a rifle, the 5x5 red stag antlers on the wall of his dining room like a magnet to my young eyes. As I grew a little older he took me deer hunting and eventually I was able to take a respectable 5x6 stag which enjoys pride of place in my trophy room today. It would be many years later before I'd have the chance to take my second trophy, a worthy fallow buck which sits proudly beside the big red.

Two successful ballots over the years with the Blond Bay Hog Deer Advisory Group gave me the chance to travel to Victoria and hunt those wonderful little hoggies and I now have two stags and a



Shoulder and pedestal mounts from Brad's first African safari.

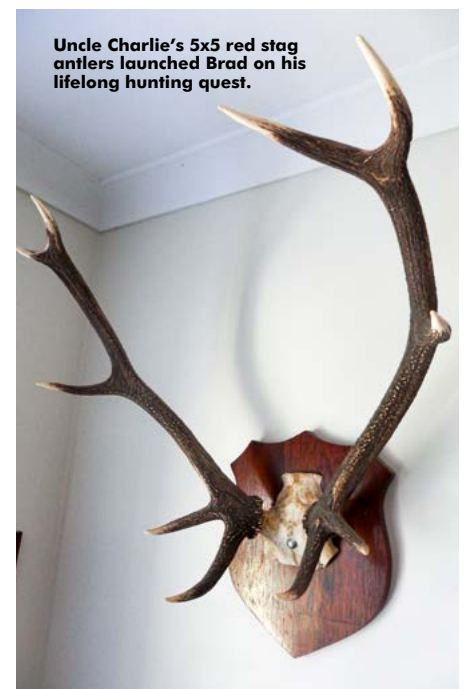
hind shoulder-mounted in the Safari Room, while a recent trip north to Charters Towers produced a notable chital stag which hangs among several fallow bucks. A couple of trips to the Victorian High Country have yet to yield a sambar stag but hopefully I'll head back there this winter for another crack - not much room on the walls but I'll definitely find a spot for a good sambar and a rusa when I have the chance.

The other two-thirds of the room is taken up with my African plains game trophies

from two separate safaris. The first was to South Africa in 2008 with my eldest son Bill and the second in 2013 to Namibia with my youngest boys Macen and Morgan. I remember my wife questioning why I'd spend all that money on a hunt for the children and I clearly remember answering: "I'll get far more out of watching them do the hunting than just doing it myself." And that I did. In fact guiding and hunting with the boys over the years has probably been the most rewarding part of my career as I've been able



The 5x6 red stag and representative fallow buck in front of Brad's hog deer trio.



Uncle Charlie's 5x5 red stag antlers launched Brad on his lifelong hunting quest.

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Hunter's mancave

to share in their successes and failures, all of which helped shape them into the young men and hunters they are today.

Mancaves and trophy rooms aren't just for hunting-related memorabilia, they're for all manner of items with special meaning for the owner. After almost 42 years in the police force and nearly half that time as a firearms and operational skills instructor, I also have my fair share of police-related mementos and photos on show. One of the hardest questions I have been asked many times is: "What's your favourite trophy?" The first time I had to sit back and think for a while before realising I don't actually have a favourite as every animal and hunt was unique and satisfying in its own way.

Sure, some of my exhibits are exceptional specimens and would measure highly on any scale but I don't care about 'official scores', other than each being a good representative of its species. In each instance the hunt itself was far more important than the result. I've met a few guys whose sole reason for hunting, taking and mounting a big trophy animal is to enhance their standing within their hunting or social group but it's all too easy to become entrapped in the 'big scoring trophy' syndrome to impress others. I can assure you I've never taken any trophy animal on that basis, it has always been solely for personal satisfaction of the hunt.

A lowly spiker can be a trophy worth mounting as it all depends on the circumstances of the hunt. Any hunter's first deer - or any deer taken with a bow - is a trophy in itself and my benchmark is generally a 'good representative head' from the



The Safari Room was a fitting location to present my nephew Frank with his Grand Slam shield.

respective species. Bigger is generally better but not always as in the last red deer roar I passed on an impressive 7x7, without doubt the largest stag I'd ever seen in the bush. But there was a problem - he was an escapee from a deer farm pen and I knew it. Consequently, knowing he wasn't a true bush deer my conscience wouldn't let me take him, even with consent of his owner, let alone have him mounted and displayed in my trophy room.

Hopefully one day I'll take a better red stag than my 5x6 but he'll have to be at

least a 6x6 and a true wild animal. Some unscrupulous poacher took that big 7x7 by spotlight from the main road so it appears some devious 'shooters' have a small moral compass regarding trophy hunting. My Safari Room is all about memories of good times with mates and family along with a sense of personal satisfaction and achievement. Just remember you're the one who determines what goes in your mancave so enjoy the hunt and savour those memories. ●



Morgan in the trophy room with dad's Steyr 30-06.



Macen's 2013 Junior Hunter of the Year award and Tartini Grand Slam shield.



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Springfield Armory's 1911 Loaded Target pistol impressed Rod Pascoe

The name Springfield Armory was a shortened form of what was more correctly known as the United States Army and Arsenal at Springfield, Massachusetts which dates back to 1794 and was mainly responsible for manufacturing and supplying firearms to the military. Following the armory's closure in 1968 the L.H. Gun Co. of Texas took on the name Springfield Armory Inc. to capitalise on the logo and brand recognition but otherwise there's no connection to the original US Government armory.

Over the years many gunmakers have taken the original military version of John Browning's iconic Colt 1911 pistol and made adaptations and improvements to cater to the sporting shooter and Australian distributor NIOA sent *Australian Shooter* one such pistol from the Springfield 1911 range to put to the test.

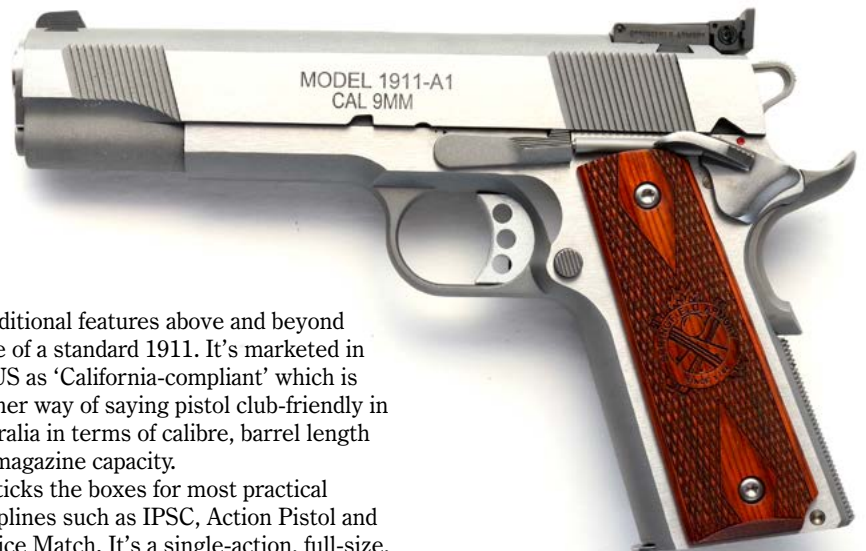
First impressions

The 1911 A1 Loaded Target comes in a modest cardboard box with a handy Cordura zipped pouch, two magazines, cable lock, security and take-down keys. It's an attractive piece intended as a shooter first and foremost, not a collectors' item and the fact it's called 'Loaded' suggests it has stacks

of additional features above and beyond those of a standard 1911. It's marketed in the US as 'California-compliant' which is another way of saying pistol club-friendly in Australia in terms of calibre, barrel length and magazine capacity.

It ticks the boxes for most practical disciplines such as IPSC, Action Pistol and Service Match. It's a single-action, full-size, forged steel frame and slide pistol and in that regard resembles the traditional blued Colt 1911 but with shiny brushed stainless steel on the flat parts of the slide and frame. That contrasts with matte-finished round surfaces around the grips and triggerguard and it's in 9mm Luger not .45 calibre as was the original, as any diehard Colt aficionado will remind you.

It comes with attractive cocobolo chequered timber panel grips with the original Springfield Armory crossed cannons logo. Obvious aspects which separate it from the original include the



An impressive look.

click-adjustable rear sight, both front and rear being dovetail mounted and can be swapped out with a number of readily available aftermarket products.

The trigger and hammer are both skeletonised. The spring housing below the grip safety is finely chequered but no such treatment appears on the front strap, something that comes down to personal preference with some favouring a chequered front strap to aid controllability (adding grip tape is always an option). The chequered backstrap



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also houses Springfield's patented Integrated Locking System, a small switch activated by the supplied key to lock the action when stored or unattended, while another small hole on the backstrap facilitates removal and disassembly of the main spring housing.

Deep front and rear serrations on the slide provide a firm grip when racking against the hefty force of the recoil spring. The frame has an extended ambidextrous safety system and extended beavertail with a memory hump. This hump or speed bump as it's sometimes called had been an aftermarket option for 1911 grip safeties for some time but these days is becoming standard fit.

Apart from the hump providing a little extra hand pressure on the grip safety for some shooters, when drawing from a holster the 'feel' of the bump confirms their hand placement on the grip. The aluminium trigger has deep vertical serrations and a hole to access a trigger over-travel screw. There's a visual loaded chamber indicator which is actually just a hole at the back of the chamber through which the rim of the case (fired or unfired) is visible.

The 127mm match-grade stainless barrel fits snugly and has a slight taper to help it settle into the bushing at the front of the slide. There's no detectable barrel movement with the slide closed and locked to the barrel. The ejection port profile has been lowered and flared presumably to prevent any



Skeletonised aluminium trigger, slide and magazine release on left side only.

hang-ups from ejecting brass becoming stuck in the action. The pistol weighs 1.2kg unloaded and has a pleasant balance although the hefty slide and low hand position makes it feel a little top-heavy.

The web between my thumb and trigger finger is comfortable and fits well into the beavertail, the grip width made for a single-stack magazine but for me is a little big overall as my thumb couldn't quite reach the magazine release without shifting my hand on the grip.

Closer look

I was a little surprised the internal workings were completely devoid of lubrication as while the pistol had clearly been fired, none of the metal-to-metal contact points

had any oil whatsoever, though I soon dealt with that after field-stripping to the point required for everyday care and cleaning.

Loaded models have a full-length recoil spring guide rod which is in two pieces. I'm not sure why they've departed from the traditional, shorter one-piece rod and plug that's been with us for years as the two-piece slows the stripping process and requires the use of a supplied Allen key (apart from that there's the potential for it to work loose). There's an argument the little bit of extra weight of the extended rod up front helps reduce muzzle flip and, having the spring supported for the full length of its travel prevents it binding inside the slide channel, though I haven't heard of this being a problem. You can change to an aftermarket one-piece rod if preferred.

The trigger has a crisp yet heavy let-off following a short, light first pressure. It's listed as having a 3lb 2oz or 1.45kg trigger pull but I couldn't register a reading below 6lb (2.72kg) after five attempts. Again this wasn't an insurmountable problem after some internal gunsmithing. The trigger reset on the other hand feels clunky but might fix itself with more lubrication and use, while the over-travel screw was well set up out of the box and required no further adjustment. The slide also contains the extractor and titanium firing pin.

At the range

Along with the pistol NIOA supplied some ammunition in Federal 115 and 124-grain Syntech cartridges and I had some Syntech

Massive beavertail, grip safety hump and extended ambidextrous safety.



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Barrel: 6.0 bull

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Trigger: match trigger, adjustable trigger stop

Magazine capacity: 9x19: 10 rounds, .45 ACP: 10 rounds

Weight incl. magazine: approx. 1.340 g

Surface: DLC42 black, 30CrN grey

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150-grainers to hand. Syntech bullets consist of a lead core coated with red polymer claimed to reduce friction, heat and fouling, therefore prolonging barrel life and minimising cleaning. The other round I tried, for those able to use jacketed ammo on their range, was Federal American Eagle 124gr FMJ.

The nine-round magazine was easy enough to load but the ninth round required more effort. All ammo tested in the Springfield fed, fired and ejected faultlessly and with the aid of a Service Pistol barricade I fired five-shot groups from 25 yards. Full house factory loads recoiled as expected and 'felt' recoil reduced as the bullet weight became heavier. The softer recoil of the heavier 150gr means it's easier to realign the sights to the target than the lighter, snappier 115-grainers and, taking my eyesight into account, I felt the groups were adequate.

The three Syntech samples grouped slightly better than the FMJ and the 115gr Syntech had the edge on the others,

something to consider depending on the match you're shooting. The pistol felt good to shoot and, out of a holster with some practice, didn't take long to master a consistent high grip thanks to the beavertail.

Conclusion

As mentioned, the only external adjustments on the pistol are to the rear sight windage and elevation settings and trigger over-travel screw. However, there are many after-market parts available for the 1911 which can be readily swapped out or modified to suit a particular requirement. The two-piece recoil spring guide rod can be replaced with the original or similar 'GI' style one-piece rod and plug, though for more intricate adjustments and modifications some basic gunsmithing skills might be called for when dealing with the main spring and leaf springs behind the magazine.

The 1911 has been a popular platform on which to build custom pistols such as in the Action Pistol Open category where, apart

from slicking the internal workings, trigger, sear and springs, external changes such as a compensators can be made with after-market or custom barrels. Alternatively, shooters can keep their 1911 in stock condition and use it for general club work. Many have a soft spot for the 1911 and will buy such a gun for the nostalgia of the 'good old days' of pistol evolution, history and development and there are plenty of versions made today by various manufacturers.

Don't judge the Loaded Target or any other pistol on appearance alone and be mindful of the purpose for which you're buying the gun. As an all-round out of the box club centrefire pistol the Springfield 1911 Loaded Target is a reliable, versatile and accurate handgun. Overall it performed well and was pleasant to shoot even with full-house factory loads, the review gun being 9mm Luger though NIOA also stock a .45 ACP version for states which allow them. Retail prices vary so it's worth checking the many websites around for a good deal and at time of writing the listed RRP is at the top of the range. ●



Specifications

Springfield Armory 1911 AI Loaded Target

Calibre: 9mm Luger, 9x19mm, 9mm Parabellum

Weight: With empty magazine 1.2kg (40oz)

Barrel: 127mm (5"), match grade forged stainless steel, one-in-16 twist

Slide and frame: Forged stainless steel

Sights: Fully adjustable target

Recoil system: Two-piece full-length guide rod

Grips: Cocobolo timber with crossed cannon logo

Magazines: Two x 9-round single-stack

Trigger weight: 3lb 2oz

RRP: About \$2100



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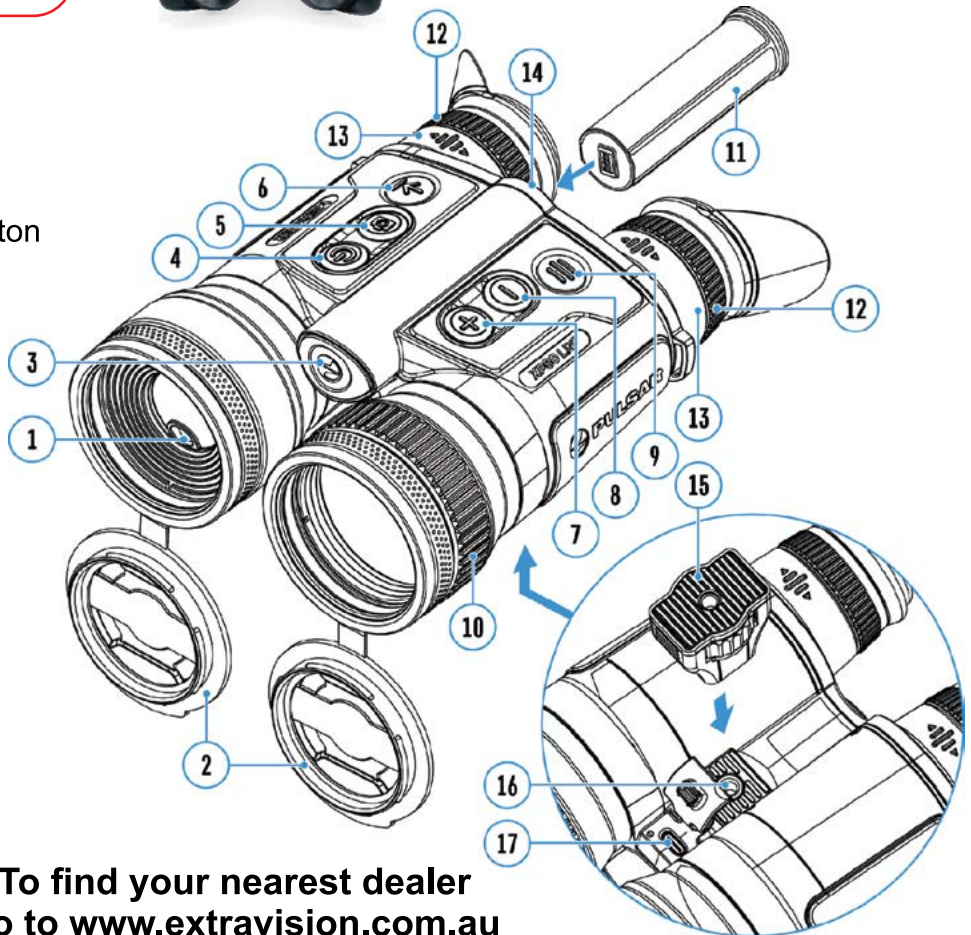


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All's well that ends well

John Dunn continues his Cobourg Peninsula adventure in the second of a three-part special

By Top End standards the morning was remarkably quiet. While the adults sat around talking and planning, Dylan and Noah took a stroll along the low tide shoreline and returned with a mud crab they'd speared in the shallows. In the middle of the afternoon we went back to the flood plains of yore and, as they had the day before, groups of horses ruined our attempts to approach the edge of the timber quietly. Muttering dire threats about the horses' doubtful future, Rob Tritten stopped the truck and we waited in the shade for things to settle down around us. It was good to sit without being bounced from pillar to post - a bone-shaking reality when

traversing the flood plains no matter what sort of vehicle you're in.

When the ground's wet at the start of dry season the horses, banteng cattle, buffaloes and pigs walk all over it and if they're lucky will only sink hock deep. The pigs and buffaloes also wallow and just to keep things interesting the former turn over hectares of country with their snouts. As the season progresses the disturbed ground dries out and sets as hard as concrete under a concealing cover of dry grass. Consequently vehicles bounce and rattle and in many places it's difficult for even a nimble hunter to walk comfortably. To try running incurs the possibility of broken limbs.

John's bull


A banteng bull appeared in the timber some 300m away and looked us over carefully before prancing away. He seemed like he was running on his toes, his gait more akin to a deer than a very bulky bovine. Through the trees we could see other animals out on the flood plains proper - big and bigger, reddish brown and black animals with stark white caudal patches, easily recognisable as bulls by their size alone.

Way, way out the grey backs of buffalo bulls were just visible above the para grass horizon, all of them accommodating white egrets which continuously lifted and settled as they fed on insects disturbed by the bulls' movement. Leaving the truck behind we paralleled the edge of the timber for a kilometre or so, heading towards a group of banteng bulls not far out on the plain. All but one was black and, as luck would have it, he was also the best. Rob looked at him carefully and nodded appreciatively with raised eyebrows.

You 'guesstimate' the length of a banteng's horns by comparing them with his ears which, on a mature bull, will be around 10" (25.4cm). A horn approaching two-and-a-half ear lengths or better is looking pretty good and while the tip-to-tip measurement adds appeal to the appearance of the trophy, it doesn't contribute to the final score. We crabbed a little closer behind some termite mounds and looked again. With a grin on his face Caleb quietly reminded me I'd told him I wanted a black bull. He was right. I had and I did but right there and then the brown bull was the best on offer and there was no way I was going to pass him up.



Dylan and Noah with a mud crab they speared at low tide.



At a little over 170m I shot him behind his right shoulder. He turned and lumbered away, clearly hit hard and not dancing along like the other bulls running with him, progressively falling back through their ranks until he was the tail-ender. We followed the dust and found him among the timber, his head down and wobbly on his feet, stubbornly resistant to the idea of falling over. Moving round to one side I put him down. He was an old bull, the growth rings on his heavy horns giving him an age of at least 13 years, teeth worn, face grey with a huge and heavy body which Rob reckoned would weigh at least 650kg.

Surrounded by a swarm of buffalo flies Rob began the job of caping my bull and at my request used a knife I'd made for him (I wanted his professional opinion on its design). He finished the job happy with the way it handled, cut and held its edge, a compliment I was happy to accept and by the time we made our way back to camp I'd already decided the bull would have to be pedestal mounted.



John's banteng bull where he came to rest. The rifle is a break-action Thompson/Center Pro Hunter in .30-06.

As the sun goes down Caleb heads for the truck with Larissa's buffalo head on his shoulders.

All's well that ends well

Noah's bull

The following morning was another leisurely start as we didn't have far to go. Perhaps 20 minutes from camp we turned off the main road on to a track little more than wheel marks through the burnt bush, heading for some spring country where Rob and Caleb had seen buffaloes and bantengs a few days earlier. Rob, Larissa and Noah headed off with their water bottles towards a creek line the dry season had reduced to a muddy string of spring-fed waterholes. Ostensibly they were after a buffalo bull for Larissa but in a plan that'd been hatched overnight, that wasn't necessarily true.

Above the last springs they found a mob of bantengs including a couple of good bulls. With the breeze in their favour they eventually stalked to within about 80m at which point Rob asked Noah if he'd like to shoot the bull on the edge of the creek. Apparently the boy's eyes lit up when Larissa said he could and with some gentle coaxing from Rob he was soon behind the rifle over the steady rest of a termite mound, the shot a good one with the bull moving no more than 30m before going down.

Then the excitement really set in. We all trooped down through the bush to help with the congratulations, caping and carry-out. Even now I'm not sure who was most pleased - Noah, Larissa or a very proud grandfather who may or may not have had the faint glint of a tear in his eye when he stuck his hand out to congratulate the boy.



An excited Noah accepts a congratulatory handshake from proud poppy Graeme.

Larissa's buffalo

In the afternoon as the heat began to go out of the day, we left camp in search of a buffalo bull for Larissa. Parked in a skinny patch of shade just inside the tree line we put the binoculars to work and before long had picked out half-a-dozen buffaloes scattered across the plain among the bantengs.

Two of them had broken horns, another was too small, a couple were too far out to see clearly which left only one that seemed to fit the bill, even if he was a couple of kilometres away.

We drove out on to the plain as far as we could safely go before Rob, Larissa and Caleb set off on foot, not an easy walk. The



Larissa with her buffalo bull where he fell. His huge body makes the horns look small. They weren't.



Larissa and her buffalo horns - a classic flood plains head with the tips remarkably intact.

ground around the edges of the plain was cracked and fissured, hard on top but soggy underneath. The bantengs and buffaloes had worn dusty pads where they walked single file until reaching the softer going and spreading out to feed but even then it wasn't easy.

Damp ground turned to mud which soon became waterlogged and sloppy, the depth of the moisture varying from sole shallow to knee deep. More water grows longer grass and as the hunt progressed visibility became increasingly limited. They had to work with the wind and sneak around other animals they didn't want to disturb or antagonise as they passed and if anything went wrong, there was no hard cover to turn to.

Almost an hour after they'd started stalking, Larissa claimed her trophy - a classic, big-bodied flood plains bull with the tips of his horns sharp and almost miraculously intact. With the sun dropping like a stone the decision was made to take the head only and leave the cape behind as it wouldn't do to be caught on the plains after dark.

There were other buffaloes and bantengs to bump into, pigs, snakes and probably crocodiles so they had to start moving while they still had light to work with. The sun

was almost gone when they reached the truck, hot and sweaty, worn out and wet and just in time to be welcomed by hordes of mosquitoes swarming out of the grass and cracks in the ground. Larissa had earned

her bull the hard way, an experience I doubt she'll ever forget.

• Next month: A fitting conclusion to an epic adventure. ●



The ground around the edges of the plain was cracked and fissured - hard on top but soggy beneath.



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Milling flutes completed with the barrel now ready for bead-blast finish.

Well worth the weight

Retro-fluting transformed an old favourite for Chris Redlich

In an attempt to reduce the weight of a rifle barrel there was a time when I'd never have considered putting my own custom barrel through the rigours and stresses of a milling machine. The firearm in question is a custom Brno in .284 Win which has featured in many of my hunting articles not to mention numerous optics and ammo reviews and while a lovely rifle to shoulder thanks to the thumbhole synthetic stock, the forward end weight when shooting offhand was a concern.

Owning another rifle sporting a factory-fluted barrel had somewhat coloured my opinion of standard barrels, although did enlighten my understanding of how well a hunting rifle actually balances when the fore-end weight is reduced by barrel fluting for use in a hunting scenario.

About two years ago I began asking local gunsmiths about their knowledge of retro-fluting an existing barrel and while not

entirely against the idea they didn't have the equipment to execute the job successfully. After some online research including numerous internet forums, a company called Total Solutions Engineering (TSE) popped up and apparently retro fluting barrels was one of their specialties, so I made plans to leave my Brno .284 at their Brisbane workshop.

The business

Many Aussie shooters would be familiar with former business MAB Barrels and in 2005 Total Solutions Engineering emerged from the purchase of MAB Engineering's barrel plant. Owners Tony and Veronica Argent have a wealth of knowledge in the firearms industry with Tony a gifted machinist of experience spanning several decades.

From the outset TSE's focus has been on all manner of rifle work and gunsmithing services - they supply barrels to both

trade and public and cater to most calibres ranging from .17 to .50. Their stainless-steel barrels are US-made 416R grade and chrome moly barrels 4140 grade steel from Australian company Milltech, with all TSE barrels made by the button rifling process which Tony reckons is best for consistent and accurate barrels. Additional to their variety of barrel fitting services are gunsmithing solutions including bolt fluting, custom rifle builds and supply and fit of custom muzzle brakes.

What's involved

Fluting of a rifle barrel is usually the last job of manufacture on a button rifled barrel and retro-fluting an established barrel is a job Tony was qualified to undertake with TSE barrel fluting done using a state-of-the-art CNC (computer numerical control) milling machine. Tony said fluting can reduce stiffness and rigidity of a barrel when compared to the original and done properly will have no effect on a correctly stress-relieved barrel. Interestingly though, a fluted barrel is more rigid than a non-fluted one of the same weight.

Reasons vary for why people have barrels fluted and three of the main ones are general appearance, better cooling and weight reduction, the latter interesting me most. TSE offer a multitude of fluting patterns including straight, wave-style, diamond and numerous spirals so I opted



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Well worth the weight

for a standard pattern of six parallel flutes. Due to my barrel being semi-heavy profile I could afford to shave a little more weight with deeper cut flutes and while Tony pointed out there is an element of risk in the process, a high success rate and positive feedback from other customers was comforting. Satisfying my curiosity a little further, he walked me through their workshop and detailed the process of retro fluting my barrel.

The process

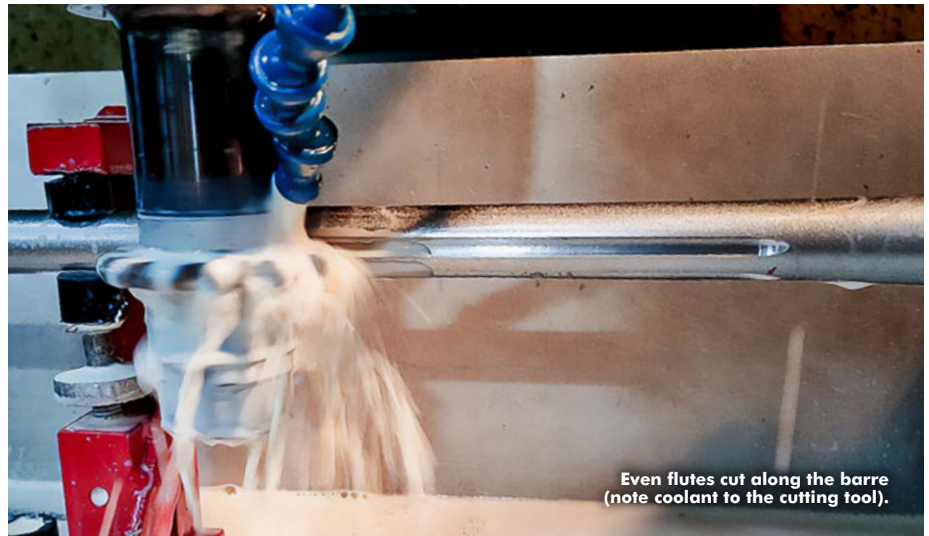
To begin with the barrelled action is removed from the stock and top dead centre is located and marked on the barrel which is then removed from the receiver and set up in the CNC milling machine with a brass crown protector. The milling tool is set to top dead centre and barrel contour programmed to the CNC then, with gentle passes of the cutting tool and plenty of coolant to the surface, even flutes are machined precisely to the barrel's profile. Once the machining process is complete the barrel is deburred and finished to the owner's requirement, in my case a non-reflective bead-blast finish though TSE can polish the surface or re-blue (chrome moly only) if desired.

Post-surgery testing

Upon receipt the fluting process not only suited the firearm but a significant drop in weight was immediately noticed when shouldering the rifle, the milling process removing roughly 400 grams from the semi-heavy stainless-steel barrel. If you want to compare what that weight feels like, imagine removing a full can of Coke that's been duct-taped to the end of your barrel - naturally you'd notice a difference.

Passing the weight test of fluting I was keen to see how the rifle performed and while a little apprehensive, my first few shots put minor concerns of retro-fluting to bed. All 3-shot groups at 100m using 150-grain Nosler Ballistic Tips landed sub-MOA, although I did notice a slight increase in recoil and muzzle jump. Yet being the fussy handloader I am and knowing my .284 was capable of shooting regular ½MOA groups, I couldn't help myself and decided to reduce the load of 54 grains of AR2209 to 52, my follow-up shots with the new 52-grain load proving successful and tightening the 3-shot groups even further.

From this test I ascertained the 54-grain load's recoil was offset by the original barrel's heavier weight, therefore shaving almost 400 grams with the fluting process increased the potential for muzzle jump



Even flutes cut along the barre (note coolant to the cutting tool).



The retro-fluting proved successful with accurate range results.

and a noticeable spike in felt recoil. By all accounts that two-grain reduction in powder appeared to tame the new lighter barrel configuration and I was pleased with the results so with range testing earning a big thumbs-up I was itching to hit the hills and go hunting.

The opening arose when my wife and I spent a pre-roar weekend setting up trail cameras and as we crested the top of a mountainous property, a hind and fawn presented. I wasn't about to let the chance of venison disappear as I raised the rifle to my shoulder and, standing offhand at around 95m, I felt comfortable aiming the .284's lighter barrel and with a single shot landed a meat deer. As is usually the case, taking the shot was the easy part of venison harvesting.

Conclusion

Although I had concerns about altering what was a perfectly good-shooting barrel,



the retro-fluting process validated a welcome improvement at the range and, more importantly, in the field. The noticeable drop in fore-end weight is what I really wanted to achieve and the modified barrel's new pointability is superb and worth every dollar for such a high-quality job (the entire project cost \$260 including bead-blast finish). TSE's service was first-class and I'd recommend them - rest assured your favourite rifle will be in safe hands. More at www.tseengineering.com.au ●



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NFA was a long-term ‘work in progress’

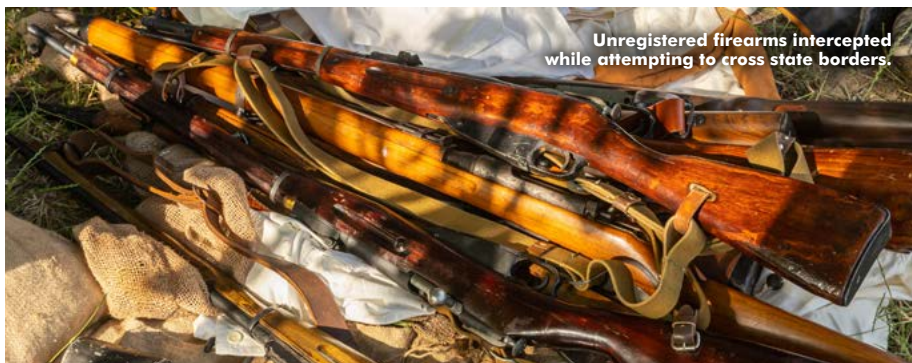
John Maxwell

Back in 2002 the Howard Government realised that for all its work banning and melting down guns and imposing the National Firearms Agreement (NFA), it really didn't have any decent laws to counter interstate firearms trafficking. Each state had its own laws for illegal possession and sale but there was no law specifically targeting illicit sales across state or territory borders.

Furthermore, different states and territories imposed widely varying penalties for the laws they did have: NSW slugged someone convicted of gun possession up to 14 years in jail, Victoria seven years, South Australia four years and all the other jurisdictions one-two years. Selling or buying a gun illegally in Western Australia could land you just six months in prison but two years in NSW and four in Victoria.

Following the Port Arthur tragedy of 1996, John Howard headed the move to create national gun laws, banning self-loading rifles and pump-action shotguns and implementing a national scheme for licensing and registration. The then Prime Minister's big achievement was gaining agreement from the states and territories (each with their own gun regulation system) on his proposed regime. The primary NFA document emerged from a special meeting of the Australasian Police Ministers' Council in Canberra on May 10, 1996 and that, along with the gun buyback, was progressively implemented across states and territories over the couple of years that followed.

Fast-forward a few years and various shortcomings in national gun laws were becoming apparent. A Cabinet submission released by the National Archives of Australia under the 20-year rule, shows the government considered the issue of cross-border firearms trafficking at a cabinet meeting in August 2002. In the submission, then Justice Minister Chris Ellison said firearms crime and the supply of firearms to the black market through trafficking were emerging problems impacting community safety. "The inadequacy of existing penalties for the illegal possession, sale or purchase of firearms under state and territory legislation is a significant area of weakness in our efforts to combat firearms trafficking," he wrote.



Up until the NFA the Commonwealth had paid modest attention to gun laws, manning the customs barriers but leaving the rest to the states and territories. Prior to the Agreement it had sought to achieve some uniformity, prompted by growing concerns following a series of gun murders. Had Howard failed to reach agreement on the NFA with states and territories he was prepared to adopt the 'nuclear' option, a national referendum to take responsibility for gun laws from states and territories and hand it to the Federal Government.

Contrary to the views of some in the firearms community, that referendum certainly would've succeeded but would we have been better or worse off? It's hard to say, though laws across the different jurisdictions would surely be far more uniform and the firearms registration access wouldn't be the patchwork it is now.

Ellison's Cabinet submission highlights the wide variation in penalties across states and territories and he proposed a single penalty under Commonwealth law for new offences involving cross-border sale of guns where the seller, buyer or both was unlicensed. The penalty was a maximum of 10 years' jail, a fine of up to \$250,000 or both. Comparable penalties were imposed under Commonwealth Customs law for illegal importation of guns, trafficking in knives and daggers and importing radioactive substances, child pornography and counterfeit credit cards.

Ellison said that reflected the serious nature of illegal firearms trafficking, particularly where it was done for profit. In contrast, NSW's penalty of 14 years for illegal possession of a gun was considered excessive, especially since illegal sale or purchase of a gun in NSW would only land you a maximum two years behind bars. Fourteen years was also the maximum for rape or robbery.

The Commonwealth laws, Ellison said, would provide the means by which those engaged in the illegal interstate gun trade could be prosecuted and receive more substantial penalties than under state or territory law. "The proposed Commonwealth offences would provide a significant deterrent to those engaging in illegal trafficking activity," he said.

In his submission Ellison gives something of a pat on the back to the shooting community. He said evidence from National Homicide Monitoring run by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) indicated that of all firearm murders, the gun used was unregistered in more than 90 per cent of cases and the offender unlicensed in 85 per cent. That's an obvious reference to the AIC study released in May 2000 which, for the first time, delivered a comprehensive rebuttal to those who'd long asserted firearm crime was mostly committed by licensed shooters.

That study was only possible because data on guns used in homicide was available to researchers because each state and territory now had registration of all legally owned firearms. Yet as we know now, the diverse state and territory registries are yet to achieve the seamless linkages which seem to have been envisaged back in 1996.

Ellison said the regulatory regime implemented through the NFA seemed to have made it difficult for irresponsible or otherwise unsuitable individuals to legitimately obtain firearms. "As those who engage in firearms-related crime in Australia are less likely to register their weapons or comply with licensing procedures, our preventative efforts should be directed at curtailing the supply of firearms to such people by targeting the black market and illegal firearms trafficking," he said.

One initiative was the 2002 National Firearms Trafficking Policy Agreement,

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NFA was a long-term 'work in progress'

ratified by the APMC Firearms Policy Working Group and intended to achieve greater consistency in state and territory legislation. This covers a lot of ground including increasing and standardising penalties to move away from the previous checkerboard of state and territory penalties, making it illegal to deface or remove a serial number (or possess a gun with defaced serial number) and expanding the definition of possession of a firearm. Legally, possession of anything can be a complex concept and the new proposals would take this to mean the gun was on any premises owned, leased or occupied by or in the care, control or management of a person.



But there was more. Each jurisdiction was to adopt consistent provisions regulating manufacture of firearms and create offences for illegal manufacturing. It may not have been contemplated at the time but such provisions now capture home 3D printing of guns.

Firearms dealers could have their licence revoked if a close associate wasn't considered a fit and proper person, which appears to have been designed to target businesses where a silent partner or shareholder was, for example, a member of an outlaw motorcycle gang. Aspiring new gun dealers would have to identify all close associates and dealers wouldn't be able to employ anyone who had their dealer or firearms licence refused or revoked in the previous decade.

And there was more still. The definition of selling a firearm was expanded to include barter or exchange, wholesale, consign or auction. There's an oft-repeated view among anti-gun elements that the original NFA document, like the Tablets of Law handed by God to Moses, was perfect and immutable from the outset and any departure by any state or territory stemmed from malign gun lobby influence and was a step down the slippery slope towards US-style gun anarchy.

Yet as moves by the Howard Government have shown, the NFA was substantially amended from very early on, something which continued for a number of years. In practical terms, any change to gun laws instigated by the Commonwealth and agreed by all states and territories is an amendment to the NFA. Example: Just a month after the NFA was agreed, a Cabinet minute noted the Commonwealth would propose to states and territories that junior shooters aged under 18 be allowed to use guns in supervised situations (the original NFA document cites only a minimum licensing age of 18).

They agreed yet anti-gun groups seem mostly unaware of this, routinely citing with horror those state and territory laws permitting junior shooters. Howard may have been ready to allow junior shooters but wasn't about to depart from the fundamental elements of the NFA. The same Cabinet minute notes Cabinet confirmed its position not to vary the ban on self-loading and pump-action shotguns, apparently following intense lobbying by shooters and their representatives including politicians and the SSAA. ●

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The large gear bag.

It's in the bag

Oztent storage solutions impressed Ben Unten

I have always been interested in maximising storage and by interested I mean obsessed. Here's the thing.

Most plastic and composite storage boxes actually create dead space with the problem being the way the top lip and lids are formed in the manufacturing process. I know it doesn't sound like much but it adds up - and bugs the hell out of me.

So I built my own plywood boxes for a time, with straight sides and recessed handles but they were heavy to the point I used to joke that the boxes weighed more than the cargo. Eventually I arrived at gear bags so when the opportunity came along for *Australian Shooter* to review a selection of these from Oztent, I jumped at the chance. Here are a few worth considering.

Toilet paper bag

The thing about toilet paper is it's like air - everyone needs it but it's no good if it's wet. This toilet paper holder is made of 210T ripstop polyester, sports a PU coating and is seam-sealed, measuring 180mm x 1800mm x 180mm and weighing 594g on my digital scales.

It features the 'roll and clip' type opening as per waterproof bags of this type. It has a clever strap which allows it to be hung upside down for easier access and to keep the contents dry in wet weather and would also allow it to be put on the outside of a pack for faster retrieving. RRP \$24.99.

Oztent gear bags - small and large

The small gear bag measures roughly 250mm high x 250mm wide x 350mm long,

weighs 828g and features a 600gsm PVC inner lining wrapped in a 410gsm (grams per square metre) canvas. It has a plastic sleeve which allows for easy, long-term, weather-resistant labelling - which would be extremely handy if several small gear bags were owned - and a padded 'grab' handle on the end of the bag to make it super easy to slide off a shelf at home.

I can see the use for multiples of this size of bag for winch gear including extension straps and rope or steel shackles, ratchet straps, tools, lighting and even pantry items - or add a garbage bag for use as a rubbish bin. RRP \$59.99.

The large offering measures about 300mm x 550mm x 300mm, weighs 1.2kg and features the same construction specifications as the small gear bag. The PVC liner allows for easy cleaning so 2-stroke/4-stroke oil, bar oil, cooking oil, barbecue tools and tongs, hotplates and camp ovens would be smoothly catered for along with bedding, clothes, toiletries and more. Both gear bags come with additional identification cards included, which is a neat touch. RRP \$79.99.

Chainsaw bag

The chainsaw is one of the final items I pack when I'm preparing to head off. I pack it last so it's readily accessible if I need it and not buried underneath everything else. Whether it's clearing tracks, cutting up fallen trees or gathering firewood, I rarely head bush without one, the problem being chainsaws don't tend to 'stack' well. This bag provides a solution by keeping your chainsaw and vehicle clean and restricts fuel fumes. The



Toilet roll holder can be hung.

review bag is approximately 320mm x 960mm x 350mm with a smaller one roughly 150mm shorter also available.

It features a padded carry handle and grab handle as well as three internal pockets and a zipper guard, the internal pockets easily holding my spare chain and spare air filter in a plastic jar. The chainsaw bag has a 3mm open cell foam padding base for extra protection with both inner and exterior linings made from 500gsm PVC which allows for easy cleaning of the inevitable oil leaks and spills. I usually pack a smaller chainsaw (12-14" bar) when travelling but this one is specified as being able to handle up to a 20" bar along with fuel and bar lube. RRP \$89.99.

Summary

Overall there's little not to like about these products. Perhaps some additional internal and/or an external pockets would be handy on the gear bags but they aren't critical on these types of accessories. They aren't strictly waterproof as there's no seal on the zipper but certainly shower-proof, ideally suited to be under a tarp either at the campsite or back of a ute.

They appear well-made and are reasonably priced for the quality. If you're looking for a lightweight storage alternative to improve capacity both at home and in camp - and make transporting gear between the two easier - then Oztent gear bags fit the bill nicely. Local retailers and more information can be found at www.oztent.com.au. ●



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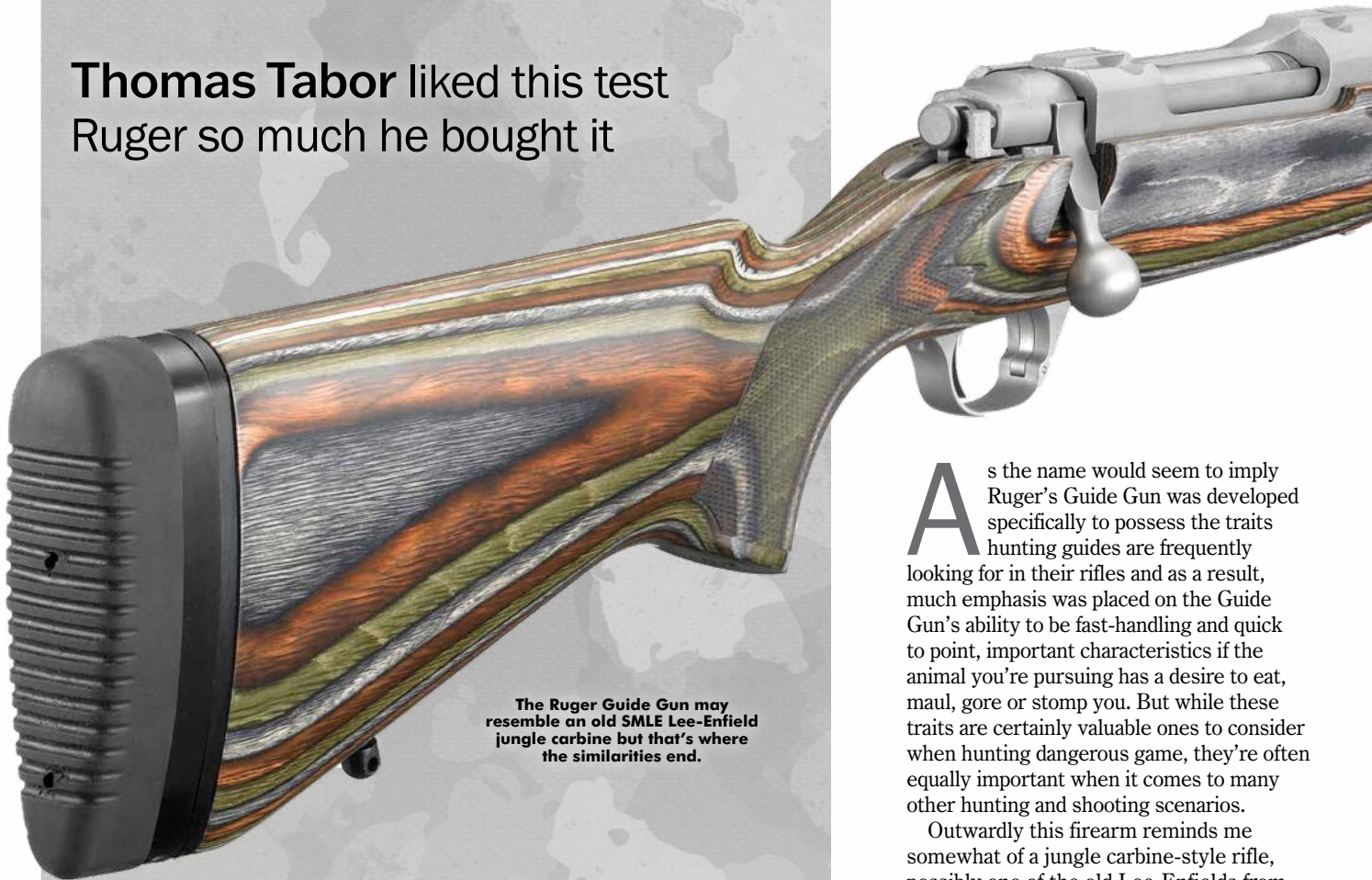
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Guiding light

Thomas Tabor liked this test
Ruger so much he bought it



The Ruger Guide Gun may resemble an old SMLE Lee-Enfield jungle carbine but that's where the similarities end.

Specifications

Manufacturer: Ruger
Model: Guide Gun
Calibre: .375 Ruger
Weight: 3.6-3.7kg
Overall length: Adjustable from 103-108cm
Sights: Safari-style iron
Action: Bolt
Barrel: 51cm
Stock: Green Mountain laminated
Magazine: Box-type, three cartridges in all calibres (.30-06 holds four)
Price: About \$1999

As the name would seem to imply Ruger's Guide Gun was developed specifically to possess the traits hunting guides are frequently looking for in their rifles and as a result, much emphasis was placed on the Guide Gun's ability to be fast-handling and quick to point, important characteristics if the animal you're pursuing has a desire to eat, maul, gore or stomp you. But while these traits are certainly valuable ones to consider when hunting dangerous game, they're often equally important when it comes to many other hunting and shooting scenarios.

Outwardly this firearm reminds me somewhat of a jungle carbine-style rifle, possibly one of the old Lee-Enfields from the WWII and Vietnam eras but I assure you the similarities end right there. At the heart of the Guide Gun is Ruger's time-proven Model 77 Hawkeye action and building on that solid foundation, engineers incorporated a wide variety of innovative advancements to enhance its field ruggedness and make it more versatile.

Test rifle

Designed to withstand anything nature can throw its way, the Guide Gun comes in an all-stainless steel construction with Ruger's Hawkeye grey matte finish and a Green Mountain laminated stock. The test rifle is chambered in the fairly new and impressive .375 Ruger calibre but is also available in .30-06, .338 Win Mag and .416

The pistol grip came attractively engraved with the Ruger logo.



Ruger. Previously there was a chambering in .300 Win Mag along with a few other less mainstream choices but those offerings have apparently been dropped from the Guide Gun line.

The .375 Ruger is an impressive round capable of stopping almost any beast you can mention and when sighted-in to impact 2.4" (61mm) high at 100yds you can expect its big 300-grain bullet to be down only 10.8" (27cm) at 300yds. In that case the bullet would launch from the muzzle at about 2660fps to produce a whopping 4713 ft-lb of energy and if choosing a slightly lighter bullet the 270-grain performs even better ballistically. Typically that bullet would exit the muzzle at about 2840fps and produce about 4835 ft-lb of energy and with the moderately high sighting of 1.8" (46mm) high at 100yds you could expect your bullet to be down only about 8" (20cm) at 300yds. Ballistically both these loads outshine the old-time favourite .375 H&H Magnum and do so from a cartridge case about the same length as the standard '06.

Another favourable and versatile feature of the Guide Gun is its Gunsite Scout-style stock which allows you to easily vary length of pull from 12½" to 14" (32-36cm) by removing or adding any combination of the supplied three 13mm spacers between the recoil pad and buttstock. The rifle also comes equipped with Ruger's LC6 trigger, a non-rotating Mauser-type controlled round feed extractor, three-position safety,

cold hammer-forged barrel, quick-pointing express-style sights, swivel studs with both a barrel-band mounted stud and fore-end stock stud, a set of 1" scope rings and integral scope-mounting base.

Accountability

Many shooters today prefer the benefits associated with having their rifle equipped with a muzzle brake which results in reducing both felt recoil and muzzle jump, yet the downside to these devices is increased muzzle blast which in some instances can be quite uncomfortable for both the shooter and anyone nearby. So in some situations it may be desirable to temporarily remove the brake from the end of the barrel, though doing this generally results in changing the barrel's harmonics which in turn can influence the bullet's impact point.

The ingenious and unique approach Ruger has taken in their muzzle brake system essentially eliminates the need to re-zero the gun each time the brake is removed and reinstalled, this design including an alternate counterweight replacement for the muzzle brake. In this case if the shooter chooses to remove the brake, it's unscrewed and the counterweight screwed into its place and in doing so the barrel's harmonic movements are said to remain the same with no change in bullet impact point.

Being somewhat sceptical by nature I wondered if Ruger's claims were accurate so conducted my own testing with the

muzzle brake fitted and then replaced by the counterweight. The results can be seen in the accompanying photo so readers can make up their own mind if the very slight deviation between the two 100yd groups is of concern or not, though I feel the difference is so minimal it would go unnoticed in almost all field conditions. Ruger even provides another option if you prefer to disregard both muzzle brake and counterweight and that's a simple threaded cap which matches perfectly the contour of the barrel and is intended to protect the threads from potential damage.

The test rifle arrived with its trigger set at what I thought was a very favourable average pull weight of 4½lb (five-pull average) and spread weight just shy of



Guiding light

12oz, so I mounted a Leupold Vari-X II 3-9x40mm scope and was keen to see how it would perform at the range. Once I had the scope zeroed and began shooting for accuracy I was quickly impressed by the performance of the trigger which I found to be crisp, void of excessive creep and generally silky-smooth in its movements.

Because I was sending quite a few rounds down I decided to shoot off the bench using a Caldwell Lead Sled with an estimated 25-30lb of additional weight added which certainly helped soften felt recoil and encouraged a higher degree of steadiness. Firing factory-loaded Hornady 270-grain SP-RP cartridges I registered what I felt were pretty good three-shot groups at 100yds, consistently measuring around 1" (25mm) with the smallest being a perfectly-shaped $\frac{7}{8}$ " (22mm).

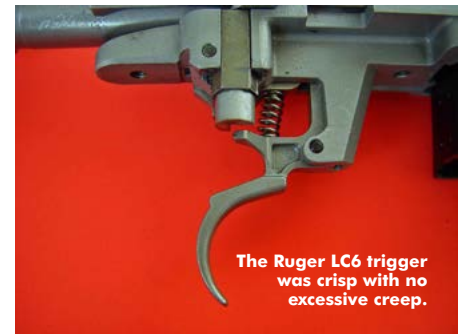
Once satisfied with accuracy of the 270-grain load I moved to factory-loaded 300-grain Hornady DGS SPF ammo and like many rifles I found this one seemed to prefer one load over another, in this case that preference was clearly for the lighter 270-grain. Even though the 300-grain loads shot what I felt were acceptable groups for a fairly large bore rifle, those produced by the 270-grain loads were overall tighter and more consistent. While those earlier rounds routinely produced cloverleaf three-shot 100yd groups in the 1" and below category, the 300-grain cartridges only seemed capable of groups about 2" (51mm).

No doubt handloaders could improve on accuracy while having access to a much broader selection of bullet styles and weights, though I was happy with performance of the 270-grain loads due to the fact that bullet weight gave the best overall ballistic performance of the two factory rounds. In addition to better accuracy, trajectory was flatter and retained energy was even higher at extended range.

The way I see it

Overall I was impressed by the Ruger Guide Gun, its durable construction certainly capable of resisting whatever the weather and hunting conditions may throw its way. For a calibre bordering on big bore status the .375 Ruger shot very accurately and I found the trigger movements much to my liking with the factory-set pull weight of 4½lb ideal for a hunting rifle and the spread between weights of pull not as great as many other triggers I've tested.

Its fast-handling capabilities and potential for lethal knockdown power would in my estimation make the Guide Gun in .375 Ruger a great choice for any sizeable trophy animal and to my mind, a large part



Bullet impact points were almost identical with muzzle brake fitted or replaced by the counterweight.



of what makes this rifle something special is its flexibility. The ability to easily adjust length of pull and remove the muzzle brake without changing impact point are very worthwhile attributes.

As a gun writer I test lots of rifles which are usually sent on loan from manufacturers and in most cases after testing they're packaged up and shipped back, though in

this case rather than returning the Guide Gun to Ruger I wrote a cheque for its purchase. I believe the versatility and other attributes built into this rifle are just what I've been looking for and as such it has become part of my collection. Just don't tell my wife who for some reason thinks I've enough firearms! ●

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Spot-on!

Chris Redlich gets 'up close' with the Leupold Santiam

It wasn't until I first hunted the Southern Alps of New Zealand in 2016 that I really understood the importance of a quality spotting scope. With a beautiful trophy chamois as a prize on my wall it was clear if I hadn't been able to assess that buck through the eyes of a premium spotting scope in bad weather, we may well have called off the stalk. A good set of binoculars is certainly a 'must' for target finding but for closer inspection of your once-in-a-lifetime trophy, a spotting scope is vital.

My association with Leupold extends to almost quarter of a century when I bought my initial Gold Ring scope (the first of many). At a NIOA promotional day towards the end of last year, I was fortunate to lay my hands on a Leupold's SX-5 Santiam HD 27-55x80 spotting scope and was more than eager to take a closer look. The Santiam line-up is Leupold's flagship range of optics and the SX-5 27-55x80 is the largest spotting scope in that stable.

Measuring 380mm and weighing just on 1.9kg isn't unusual for a spotting scope

with 80mm objective and although it's bulkier than my own spotter with 65mm lens, the increased field of view from the big lens is a definite advantage when glassing and, despite its dimensions, the Santiam can still be tucked away nicely in most hunting day packs.

The SX-5 is available with a straight eyepiece but our test version is the 'angle' option with the eyepiece sitting at 45 degrees

to the body axis. To break things down, from back to front the variable zoom dial has a large surface area with a corrugated grip pattern that's firm yet easy to turn from 27x right round to the maximum 55x magnification. Additionally, the over-sized eyepiece has a twist-up eyecup adjustable to 17mm, providing comfortable eye relief for those wearing glasses.



Santiam SX-5 spotter with 'sunshade' extended to cut peripheral glare.

Thumb lock dial for adjusting scope body angle.



Business end of the Santiam is its 80mm objective lens, delivering wide field of view and sharp resolution.



For sharpening the view of all images at any range the full circumference, fast-focus wheel sitting forward of the eyepiece also has a large corrugated grip pattern for easy adjustment. Increasing the Santiam's versatility is its ability to fully rotate the angle eyepiece, enabling the shooter to optimise the view of their chosen target from awkward positions.

This is done by simply slackening the small thumb lock dial on the right and allowing the scope body to fully rotate via the integrated tripod mount to the desired angle and, once achieved, tighten again. I find this feature particularly handy when shooting from a bench as it allows me to view my shots by simply leaning and looking without having to be directly behind or above the spotter.

For firm attachment to a tripod the SX-5 integral blade-style mount has a standard 1/4-20 UNF thread for universal fastening to most camera and spotting scope tripods. Leupold have tripods specifically to suit the Santiam spotter, though it's worth noting NIOA are now sole distributors of Spartan Precision Equipment who also have several tripod options in their range.

At the business end is a large scratch-resistant 80mm high definition objective lens which, combined with Leupold's proven Twilight Max HD coating, allows ample light transmission for clear and high-resolution images through to last light. Furthermore, on low magnification this gives the operator a highly impressive 40m field of view at 1000m. Additional to the objective is an extendable 'sunshade' which

helps reduce image washout from peripheral glare in bright conditions.

Being both waterproof and fogproof, the SX-5 Santiam features a lightweight yet rugged rubberised armour which provides maximum protection in the harshest conditions and also comes supplied with a removable neoprene soft-skin cover.

During field use I was impressed to say the least at how clear the images were of surrounding countryside through the entire magnification range - the SX-5 Santiam HD spotter designed and manufactured in the US is high-quality glass well worthy of consideration. Distributed and backed by NIOA's after-sales service, the SX-5 is covered by Leupold's lifetime guarantee. Contact your local dealer for price and availability. More at www.nioa.com.au ●

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Helping hands

Teamwork the key to deer control, writes Leon Wright

Sitting practically motionless in our blind I was starting to feel the intense cold working its way through my layers of clothing. The weather bureau had tipped it to reach -5C by morning yet it was 8pm and I reckon it was there already. The campfire was beckoning and I was just about to call a halt to our vigil when my brother Greg spotted two stags feeding roughly 150m away.

He'd been watching them through his handheld Night Vision optic as they entered the paddock from the bush line behind. I switched on the Sytong HT66 Night Vision attached to the scope on my Ruger .300 Winchester Magnum and settled in behind my old bamboo shooting sticks to line up the closer of the two. As the shot rang out the first stag dropped and the second hit the grass and headed for the scrub. But he made the mistake of stopping at the fence line and, although 250m away, I could see him clearly through the night vision and as it was still safe to shoot I took a steadied shot and dropped him too.

I said to Greg: "Let's head back to camp, we can field dress them first thing in the morning as there's no way they'll go off in this weather." Before leaving I paced out the distance between the blind and the second stag and at 275 paces it was a long shot for me. Mine are usually between 100m and 150m though some have been a lot closer.

Being a stalker of sambar from way back I wasn't particularly keen to be shooting deer with the night vision, but a while back when discussing the overabundance of deer the property owner was facing, I told him we sympathised with his predicament and were happy to help out as we had the know-how and the means to do so.

We adhered to a few self-imposed rules for safety's sake. No shot, no matter how tempting, was to be taken downhill towards the farmhouse, with all shots instead up into the bush line. Under no circumstances would we shoot deer and just leave them to rot in the bush as that goes totally against the grain. Rifles were to be carried



This young hind provided excellent eating.



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Helping hands

with rounds in the magazine, none in the chamber and lastly we'd do everything on foot with no shooting from the vehicle. We'd operate on the dark side of the moon for a couple of nights, as hunting in this manner isn't successful when paddocks are lit by moonlight and deer can be skittish.

We only had two paddocks to work which butt on to the adjacent bush line so set up our blind 100m or so away and made sure we were in position at least an hour before dark. This paid dividends at first as deer were coming down in late afternoon though after a few sessions and some shooting activity, we found they naturally became more wary and weren't entering the paddocks until nightfall.

We'd wait in the blind until around 8pm and, if our luck was in, a deer or two would show up. My brother would locate them with the handheld night vision optic and when I was ready to shoot, he'd turn on the Nitecore MT40 torch and I'd do the rest, the torch throwing enough light for me to pick them up in my Zeiss Conquest scope. Eventually the deer woke up to the light and as soon as it was on they were off, so we reverted to using the night vision on the rifle as well. If lucky enough to score a deer or two from the blind we'd



The Sytong HT66 Night Vision device is easy to attach to the riflescope and can be taken off just as easily for stalking.

head back to camp before trying our luck in the other paddock.

By then it's usually around 10pm and there's normally up to a dozen sambar feeding in that paddock though sneaking around in pitch dark carries its own dangers and it wouldn't take much to fall down a wombat hole and break a leg. So it's for this reason Greg carries a small torch which is switched on and held against his leg to guide the way forward. Our system is to

walk into the paddock Indian file, stopping about 20m in so Greg can scan the place through the night vision and, on locating the target, I step forward and take the shot. The only down side I've noticed is that the slightest unfamiliar sound like a boot scuff and the deer take off.

No two hunts are the same and on one pitch black night when we'd entered the paddock just 150m from camp, it didn't take long for Greg to pick up three deer chowing



Most of the stags taken were shot late at night in secluded areas of the property.



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Helping hands



As much meat as possible is taken which means minimum wastage.



This hind was taken late afternoon from the blind in the background.

down on fresh clover, a stag and two hinds about 100m away. I told him I'd take the stag first so knelt down and rested the rifle on the shooting sticks and as Greg turned on the Nitecore torch I fired and hit the deer behind the shoulder.

We quickly moved to the other paddock and again it didn't take long to pick up a target animal and on asking how many there were the reply came back: "About half a dozen." Then in an instant things went awry as one of us trod on a stick and the crack as it snapped seem amplified on such a still night and the deer were off. As luck would have it a big spiker chose to gallop straight past us and with still time to take a safe shot I dropped him on the spot.

On our next trip to the same paddock we saw seven sambar feeding way out in the middle. "Two stags, one's a whopper, a couple of spikers and the rest are hinds," my brother reported after watching them for a spell. I took the smaller stag with the first shot and the rest were off, the huge stag looking quite magnificent as he sped across

the paddock. On reaching the boundary fence he cleared it like a steeplechaser and it pleased me that we'd let him run free. The spiker behind wasn't so lucky. I had the rifle lined up waiting for him to pause before tackling the fence and as he did so I fired and, while he'd negotiated the fence, he was dead when he landed on the other side.

On our latest trip due to shocking weather we were only able to get out once but nabbed a stag and a hind. It took us two attempts to claim the former, the first one spooking the stag which bolted though we found him feeding at the far end of the paddock later that night. This is the fourth winter we've been hunting in this way and that stag and hind made it a total of 52 sambar we've removed for the owner from those two paddocks.

And in case you're wondering what we do with all the meat, I like eating it, I treat my dogs on it and take bags of mince across the street to a friend who also feeds her dogs. My neighbour is pleased when I hand him some backstraps over the fence and my brother shares it around as well as eating it himself and feeding his dogs. I cook up the occasional roast and my daughter takes all she can to give to her numerous farm dogs. Believe me, nothing goes to waste.

While sitting around the campfire on our recent hunt, the farmer showed up and asked us how we were doing and when I told him our running total on his property was now north of 50, he smiled and said: "Gee, you blokes do a good job." ●

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SIFA Shooting Industry Foundation Australia

National Register talks must involve *all* relevant parties

Media and Politics Officer Rachael Oxborrow

The Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (SSAA National) is responding to a consultation paper released by the Attorney-General's Department on the concept of a National Firearms Register with the interests of the 213,000-plus members of our state and territory associations front of mind.

While sensible regulation of civilian firearm ownership guided by evidence-based research can be accepted, years of evidence which includes the introduction of the National Firearms Agreement (NFA) in 1996 and National Handgun Control Agreement in 2002 suggests little is achieved in tightening legislation for law-abiding licensed firearm owners in terms of public safety benefits.

Public safety is almost always threatened by an unlicensed person with an unregistered firearm in the rare case where firearms are involved. Indeed in the most recent Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) investigation of firearms used in homicides in 2006-07, more than 93 per cent were unlicensed and unregistered. The AIC studies also show the introduction of the NFA has had no significant effect on reducing firearm homicide or suicide rates.

As the Federal Government continues to press on with plans for a National Firearms Register, it will be imperative that trusted non-government entities such as SSAA National, the Shooting Industry Foundation of Australia (SIFA) and other relevant groups are involved at policy and deliberation level. This will allow the Government to consult on workable solutions, communicate with the wider firearms community and prevent the occurrence of unintended consequences from policy decisions.



The concept of a Register was raised in late 2022 following an appalling act of domestic terrorism which prompted elected leaders to immediately demonise firearm owners. It soon became clear there was more to the story of the perpetrators and that system failings may have contributed to the tragic events. National Cabinet, Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus and state and territory Police Ministers are progressing plans for a National Firearms Registry with haste, the next milestone for reporting tipped to be mid-year. SSAA National's submission to the Attorney-General's Department is available online at www.ssaa.org.au

Meanwhile in mid-March, SSAA (ACT) hosted the Parliamentary Friends of Shooting group (PFOS) for its first planned outing of 2023. The event at Sporting Shooters' Pistol Club of ACT brought together politicians, staffers and friends with co-chairs being Victorian Nationals Senator Bridget McKenzie and New South Wales Labor Member for Hunter, Dan Repacholi.

After a safety briefing by local range officers, participants took part in introductory shoots using .22 calibre pistols on the 25m International Sport Shooting Federation

range and 9mm pistols on the Falling Plate range. In addition to allowing PFOS representatives to build important social ties, the event allowed SSAA representatives to talk about our Association, disciplines and ethos. SSAA (ACT) reports several membership inquiries have come from local staffers following the shoot.

In news out of Western Australia, SSAA (WA) representatives joined leaders of WA grassroots target shooting and hunting groups, outdoor enthusiasts, land managers, politicians and industry figures to collaborate and safeguard the future of law-abiding firearm owners in that state. The WA Government's proposals for a rewrite of the Firearms Act began in March 2022 and have subjected all firearm owners there to a campaign creating fear in the broader community around legal firearm ownership and use.

The WA Firearms Symposium was a ground-breaking event which resulted in a significant 'gathering of clans' determined to concentrate resources and allow us and other group leaders to come together to inform the WA Firearms Community Alliance. The aim was to create a united and consistent approach to communicating with and advocating to the government. ●



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SIFA



Euro vision



The Meopta MeoPro Optika5 2-10x42 as reviewed.

Con Kapralos was well impressed by the MeoPro Optika5

While Europe may be home to some of the world's best sport optics manufacturers, only a select few can really be considered leaders in design and manufacture encompassing medical, scientific, military, industrial and consumer goods. Meopta Optika, based at Prerov in the Czech Republic, is one such groundbreaker with its roots spanning more than a century, their riflescopes, binoculars, spotting scopes and more being testament to their expertise in glass and making the viewing experience an enjoyable one.

The MeoPro Optika5 stable of riflescopes was introduced in 2021. It's based around a one-inch main tube and encompasses three models in the 2-10x42, 3-15x44 and 4-20x50 which are aimed squarely at the hunting market with an assortment of suitable reticles in the Z-Plex, Z-Plus, Z-Plus RD and BDC3. Meopta distributor Winchester Australia supplied the 2-10x42 for review with a Winchester XPR rifle in .350 Legend calibre and from the outset the Optika5 appealed as an excellent riflescope suited to either rimfire or centrefire use.

External features

The Optika5 is a relatively compact unit measuring 232mm and weighing 590 grams, its body crafted from a single piece of aircraft-grade aluminium with a one-inch main tube



finished in anodised matte black. From the front, the objective bell which houses the 42mm objective lens measures 49.6mm and sports an attractive blue band for added visual appeal. The one-inch main tube segments fore and aft of the turret housing provide ample room for scope ring mounting, measuring 40mm and 55mm respectively.

The turret housing on this model contains capped windage and elevation turrets and the design of these is one major characteristic of the Optika scope bracket. The caps have a distinctive grip pattern made of hard rubber around their outer

edge which is also shared with the power magnification dial. The caps are quite large at roughly 36mm wide and for good reason, as they protect the superbly designed dials beneath. The dials are both marked '1-click = ¼ MOA' and the graduations on the dial collars are from 0 to 24 with four increments between each unit. Both dials are easily resettable to the '0' mark by simply easing off the large-slotted screw and lining up the mark with the white index lines on the tube body.

The clicks on both dials are positive and audible, absolutely top notch. To the rear of



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The Optika5 2-10x42 on Winchester's XPR rifle in .350 Legend.

the riflescope the power magnification dial and ocular housing seem a bit 'chunkier' than the comparative MeoPro range, measuring 85mm by 44mm. The power magnification ring encompasses a large collar which accommodates a hard rubber grip ring on the leading edge and behind it is an alloy collar with magnification numerals inscribed in white. A small white mark on the ocular housing provides the reference point for setting magnification.

The ocular housing is neat and tidy with model and magnification along with country of manufacture inscribed in white. On the leading edge of the housing, a fast-focus eyepiece (diopter) allows precise focusing of the reticle to suit the user's eyesight and is smooth in operation and adjustment provision, eye-relief an impressive 90mm which is ample enough for even the heaviest recoil. The body is fully sealed, nitrogen purged and together with the lovely hard anodised and scratch-resistant matte black finish should take whatever punishment the owner and Mother Nature throw at it.

On the inside

The Optika5 is just that - based on a five-times magnification range. Meopta are one of the few European optics firms

who grind, polish and complete their own lenses to suit the intended applications, the glass superbly finished with light transmission of 91 per cent using treatments including their patented MeoBright 550 (MB-550) and MeoDrop, which give wonderful colour, clarity and resolution. The MeoDrop lens coatings are applied to the exterior surfaces of the lens elements and are of a hydrophobic nature, which instantly repel moisture by forming any water into spherical droplets which disperse immediately.

What makes these lens elements superior in optical performance is the MeoBright-550 (MB-550) lens coating process, applied as an ion-assisted, multiple layer coating procedure to create a layer which reflects less light and so permits maximum light transmission for a brighter image. Having said that, the brightness of any riflescope is dictated by the size of the exit pupil and the way in which the human eye accepts light. This is no optometry lecture but the Optika5 scope, with its 42mm objective lens, delivers ample light to the eye which translates to better shooting and hunting in most light conditions.

The reticle is the Z-Plus with the ever-popular Z-Plex also available, these being glass-etched and in the second focal plane. The Z-Plus reticle has a horizontal cross-hair with MOA graduations making up the middle 50 per cent of the stadia with a small black dot in the middle, the vertical cross-hair having holdover sub-tensions for elevation and windage. No doubt this will appeal to those who like complicated reticles as such with provisions for holding off and over your target, though personally I'd opt for the simple Z-Plex every time. Field of view is good, running from 18.6m to 3.8m at 100m.

Elevation and windage turrets are superb, crisp and audible clicks with clear and precise markings on the dials.



The ocular housing is a bit 'chunkier' than the normal MeoPro range but serves its purpose well.

In action

It seems these days too many hunters over-scope their rifles unnecessarily. For a general purpose hunting optic, I'd be confident in taking all manner of game out to sensible distances with the review scope, though for those who demand a little extra magnification, the 3-15x44 and 4-20x50 are more than worthy candidates to consider in the Optika5 series.

Using the scope atop the XPR calibre was purely for accuracy testing and a spot of hunting in that calibre. To assess it further I fitted it to my favourite .22 WMR bolt-action rifle and tested the tracking of the optic's windage and elevation turrets. As expected, the adjustments dialled into the windage and elevation were spot-on but this is no surprise on a scope with the Optika5 pedigree. What's more pleasing is Optika5 choices won't break the bank, with all models available from \$645 to just under \$1000 (though it pays to shop around). More at www.winchesteraustralia.com.au ●

Specifications

- Manufacturer:** Meopta Optika, Czech Republic
- Model:** MeoPro Optika5
- Magnification:** 2x-10x
- Objective lens diameter:** 42mm
- Main tube diameter:** 1" (25.4mm)
- Reticle:** Glass-etched, second focal plane Z-Plus (Z-Plex also available)
- Parallax:** Fixed at 100m (adjustable model also available)
- Field of view:** 18.6-3.8m at 100m
- Exit pupil:** 10.3 to 4.2mm
- Eye relief:** 90mm
- Windage and elevation:** ¼ MOA clicks
- Light transmission:** 91 per cent
- Weight:** 590g
- Length:** 232mm
- RRP:** \$645 but shop around



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Chalk and cheese: 1875 Springfield Arms Trapdoor Officers' Model and 2022 Phoenix Weaponry AR.

Time-traveller

Derek Nugent salutes the longevity of the .45-70 Government cartridge

Every other day it seems manufacturers are offering up a new cartridge to the shooting community. Promoted as ushering in new levels of performance and versatility, they join the myriad of established calibres already firmly entrenched in common usage. Many of these existing calibres have stood the test of time, enjoying an enviable level of popularity spanning decades or in some cases a century or more. Interestingly, a host of cartridges with a military pedigree enjoy such celebrity and have in turn been the inspiration for other modern-day favorites, among them the .223, .308 (.243), .30-06 (.270) and venerable .45-70.

History

The .45-70 was named for the fact its .45 calibre projectile was driven by 70 grains of black powder and owes its existence to the US military's post-Civil War need to convert many thousands of muzzleloaders to breechloaders. It was a question of money which drove the decision to find an efficient and economic conversion for these firearms, such a conversion facilitated in 1865 when the Master Armorer at Springfield Armory, Erskine Allin, successfully patented the first versions of the classic Springfield Trapdoor.

Yet it wasn't until 1873 with the standardisation of US military ammunition the 'new' .45-70 cartridge was officially paired with the Trapdoor for military use (both rifle and carbine models). It replaced the existing .50-70, using a 405-grain projectile in the carbine and 500-grain in the rifle versions, remaining in service until 1894 when the Trapdoor was superseded by the Krag-Jorgensen (Krag/Army .30-40) bolt-action rifle.

Over the ensuing 20 years the .45-70 gained a substantial following among hunters and frontiersmen, impressed by the performance of the round and spoilt for choice around rifle and ammunition pairings,

as every major manufacturer offered both single-shot and repeating arms options.

Enduring popularity

Roughly 150 years on the .45-70 hasn't just endured but thrived on its reputation as a hard-hitting, reliable round, having been variously adopted by the military, lawmen, big game hunters, guides and more recently by lever gun enthusiasts. Its popularity may have waned at times but has never been extinguished. In the 1920s and '30s it appeared the .45-70 may have had its day as manufacturers, including Winchester, had ceased production of firearms chambered for the round so while ammunition was available, no new firearms were made after 1935.

Yet due to its ingrained popularity the calibre quietly persisted until it experienced somewhat of a renaissance in the 1960s and '70s when it was 'rediscovered' by a new generation of shooters appreciative of its knock-down performance, particularly at close quarters or in thickly-timbered country. Indeed the 1970s saw many manufacturers reintroduce offerings in .45-70 in response to rising interest and demand.

Fast-forward to the present day and the .45-70 is offered by a plethora of firms and can be had in almost any imaginable configuration including single-shot, lever guns, double rifles and, in the US, bolt-actions and even AR configurations (both as custom jobs). Diehard enthusiasts can track down original late-19th and early 20th century examples by the likes of Winchester, Springfield and Remington

while classic reproductions are available by Henry, Uberti and Pedersoli with Ruger, Marlin, Baikal and Chiappa among others all providing offerings to the market.

Similarly any fan of the .45-70 is spoilt for choice in respect to factory ammunition as PPU, Winchester, Remington, Hornady, Federal and Barnes all list a variety of rounds with impressive variation in projectile types and weights available and that's to say nothing of the fact that handloading variables are also well catered for.

Personal preference

One of the most common presentations of the .45-70 in Australia is the classic lever gun, perhaps in recognition of the highly effective nature of the round on feral pigs, particularly at close quarters. The big, slow-moving .45 projectile coupled with the fast follow-up capability of a lever gun is certainly hard to beat and is my personal preference, with the Marlin 1895 SBL my rifle of choice.

Being a left-hander I've always been attracted to lever guns and own several and can't speak highly enough of the Marlin 1895 SBL. This includes the quality of finish to its smooth, flawless functioning and devastating finality with which it grasses game. The SBL measures 940mm including a 470mm (18.5") barrel and weighs 3.6kg, the stock a black/grey laminated hardwood with the pistol grip and metalwork all stainless steel. The rifle's half-cock safety is enhanced by a cross bolt through the receiver and Marlin's



Marlin Model 1895 SBL.



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Time-traveller

traditional two-piece firing pin means it can't be fired until the breech bolt is deliberately and fully engaged.

Marlin promotes this variant as being ideal for deer, bears and moose and their advertising proclaims the SBL as "a new definition of loaded for bear, destined to be a top choice of North Country guides. It will deliver the massive punch of a .45-70 Govt with unmatched speed with the lethal assurance of a six-round capacity, rapid target acquisition and its big loop lever adds a distinctive traditional style while promoting sure follow-up shots even with gloves". In my experience none of these claims are overstated.



Ammunition alternatives: factory and handloads.

In the field

I've comfortably taken both boars and stags with my Marlin, the rifle coming to the shoulder in a comfortable and business-like manner. It points naturally and unwaveringly, probably due to its left and short overall length which also allows for ease of handling in thickly vegetated environs, target acquisition being rapid and follow-up shots fast.

I initially installed an Aimpoint Micro H1 red dot sight on the Marlin and enjoyed much success on boars in close cover, though now I mainly chase red deer so the rifle is topped with a more traditional telescopic sight in the Nikko Stirling Boar Eater 1-6x24 illuminated 4 dot. I find this combination enhances the gun's flexibility in the more open ridge country I stalk for deer and similarly my choice of ammunition has evolved over the years and through experience.

To begin with I used 325gr FTX Hornady factory loads but more recently have settled on handloaded 350gr Flat Point Hornady Interlocks and 250gr Barnes TSX FBHP. In recognition of the ballistics of these rounds and my usage of the rifle, I chose to sight my .45-70 to be spot-on at 25m which means it's back on point at just over 100m. The undeniable 'rainbow' trajectory of the .45-70

doesn't really kick in until this range but can be significant beyond that depending on the ballistics of your chosen projectile.

I don't target game past the 100m mark as my preference is to stalk as close as possible, so the vast majority of my kills have been sub-50m, these considerations reflecting my own experiences and preferences though wouldn't suit everyone. Individual hunters have always 'tuned' firearms to their specific understandings and requirements and as such have their own opinions as to what works best.

Final analysis

The .45-70 is here to stay. While it has certainly had a roller coaster ride over the years in terms of popularity and availability of firearms and ammunition, it's very much in the ascent at the moment. The cartridge is well supported by manufacturers with a wide array of rifles and ammunition available. Devotees of the calibre are legion and in Australia it's a popular choice for hunters targeting pigs, buffaloes and everything in between. For shooters after a hard-hitting, reliable round for coming to terms with game in thick lantana, paper bark swamps or timbered ridges, the .45-70 in a rifle like the Marlin SBL would be a hard combination to beat. ●

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In his Element



Side profile of Titan mounted in Element Accu-Lite rings on a 20 MOA base rail

Daniel O'Dea was impressed by this substantial riflescope

While back I was introduced to Element Optics, a brand distributed in Australia by SJS Trading and to be honest my initial thoughts were along the lines of: "Here we go, yet another optics brand." But after a quick overview from Steve Sayers at SJS my interest was spiked. There are a few different variants with the Element range but in the spotlight here is the Titan 5-25x56 FFP.

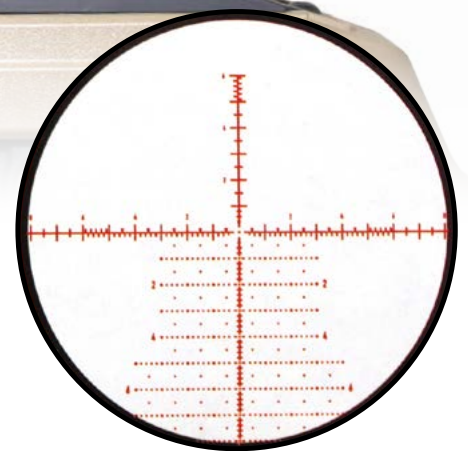
On opening the box my first impressions were I was dealing with a rather substantial scope. Weighing just over 1.1kg with a 34mm tube and 56mm objective lens, it's dominated by generously large adjustment turrets. Clearly aimed at some of the more popular long-range rifle disciplines, I could see the scope appeared to carry all the primary desired features. Starting at the front with an outside diameter of 64mm, it's threaded to accept a supplied sunshade of 75mm in length, lens protection provided via either flip-up or rubberised bikini-type covers. Again, both are part of the kit.

Moving back 60mm the objective housing begins a gradual taper ending at the 34mm main tube 65mm later. The main tube is about 175mm long including the centrally located turret housing, before a short

sharp taper back up to the 45mm ocular housing which includes the power change ring and diopter adjustment. The overall scope length finishes at 385mm and I guess proportionally if riflescopes were athletes, this one appears more a rugby player than gymnast - solid and sturdy with a no-nonsense look.

Staying at the ocular housing it's worth noting the large, bevelled power change ring is clearly marked in increments of 1x from 5 to 8 power before jumping to 10, 12, 16 and finally 25x magnification. All markings line up when adjusted with a corresponding white arrow on the housing.

The ring includes provision for the fitment of an optional quick change or 'throw' lever which is also provided as part of the kit. Pleasingly, I found the power change ring to have just about the perfect resistance when moving between settings. It was firm enough for precise, unshifting, adjustment without being so secure you actually need the throw lever to provide leverage to shift it, as I've found to be the case in some cheaper optics. The diopter ring is non-telescoping of hard rubber with a small dot and arrow corresponding to centre and the standard



APR-2D MRAD reticle.

Specifications

Magnification range: 5-25x56

Focal plane: First (FFP)

Body tube diameter: 34mm

Overall length: 15.16"/385mm

Mounting length: 5.9"/150mm

Weight: 39oz/1105g

Click value: .250 MOA or .1 MRAD

Internal adjustment range: E: 90 MOA/26.2 MRAD

W: 50 MOA/14.5 MRAD

Parallax adjustment: 15yds to infinity

Eye relief: 3.5"/90mm

Field of view at 100yds/m: 5x: 24.1ft/7.35m

25x: 4.9ft/1.5m

Exit pupil: 5x: 11.2mm

25x: 2.1mm

Illumination: Six-position adjustable

Elevation feature: Zero-stop

Power throw lever: Optional (supplied in box)

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In his Element

+/- to indicate adjustment direction - simple and effective.

At the heart of the scope is the turret tower with three oversized turrets (roughly 35mm diameter), the benefit of a 34mm tube being it provides enough room for the scope mechanism required for said adjustment range. The Titan 5-25x56 has a full 90MOA or 26.2 MRAD of vertical and 50MOA or 14.5 MRAD of horizontal modification which should be ample. It's available in both MOA and MRAD variants and adjustment values are either ¼ MOA or 1/10 MRAD per click respectively. Likewise the turrets provide 25MOA or 10MRAD tuning per revolution.

As per a traditional three turret layout the top one handles elevation, the right windage and the left parallax adjustment. Having an illuminated reticle, the left turret serves a dual purpose in tweaking both parallax and illumination brightness and also houses a single 2032 battery to power illumination.

The turrets are toolless so you can unscrew the retaining caps by hand to lift them off and reset zero for elevation and windage. Likewise the elevation tower has a zero-stop provision. The zero-stop mechanism is a ring which keys on to a stop that allows you to return the elevation turret to zero by just dialling down until it hits this hard stop, the ring adjusted via three small 1.5mm hex locking screws. Basically you remove this ring prior to initial zero and with the desired zero achieved, the ring is refitted and rotated to its hard stop before the retaining screws are retightened. Now when the turret is replaced and lined up the 'zero' stop prevents it from adjusting into negative elevation.

The left-hand turret has a large inner ring to adjust the parallax from as low as 15m out to infinity with clear markings at various likely ranges. An outer smaller ring provides by rotation six levels of intensity for the reticle illumination and with settings marked 1-6, a separation dot position between each number details individual off positions. This means you don't have to rotate through all settings and one position either way has the illumination on or off.

The Titan 5-25x56 FFP features stainless steel internals claimed to provide better resistance against wear and tear when dialling regularly. Once upon a time most scopes were 'set and forget' when it came to turret adjustment - you held over for elevation. These days with rangefinders, ballistic calculators and modern technology it's far more common to dial for elevation so dials (especially elevation) can receive a real work out.



Within the scope 17 lenses work all the magic providing excellent clarity with ED (Extra-low Dispersion) glass minimising chromatic aberration. Basically the scope has high-end internals. ED optical components are made with rare earth elements such as titanium dioxide, zirconium dioxide, calcium fluoride which perhaps hints at where the 'Element' brand name comes from. For testing I mounted the Element Titan on my Howa 1500 6.5 Creedmoor (currently KRG Bravo-stocked) and being confident in the rifle's consistent accuracy, I've no hesitation in using it to test optics. To mount the scope, SJS had also supplied Element Accu-Lite ring mounts.

Once on the rifle I sighted in and set the zero-stop. The rifle's accuracy was repeatable so we were off to a good start. With a 56mm objective lens, light transition was good and the larger objective provides greater exit pupil which bases on magnification ranges from 2.1mm at 25x up to 11.2mm on 5x. Eye relief is long

enough at roughly 90mm (3.54"-3.74" from the specifications) and field of view for the Titan measures 4.6Deg to 0.92Deg highest to lowest at 90m (100 yards). Optically the scope was clear and bright with quality expected of the premium components used.

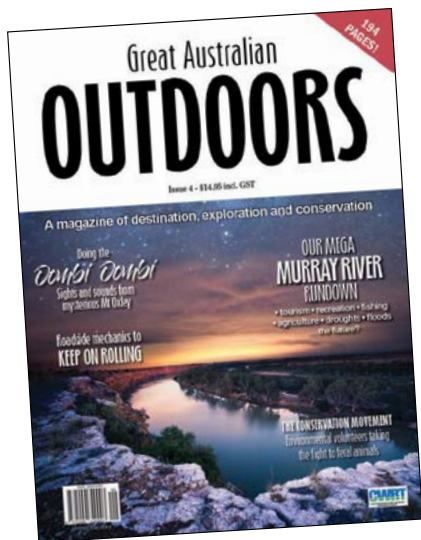
Apart from optical quality the most important attribute of a riflescope is its ability to track correctly, for its adjustments to perfectly coincide with what's dialled every time. It's no use dialling for elevation if, when you return to zero, the point of impact has changed. The Titan started off well when sighting in as, using the reticle, I was able to measure the mils my point of impact was out and pretty much dial straight to zero.

On another occasion I decided I'd run a standard tracking drill by shooting a square. With the rifle on a bench at a 100m I'd start by shooting a round and maintaining the same point of aim. I'd adjust 10 clicks up, shoot another round, 10 clicks right, shoot another, 10 clicks down, shoot again, 10



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In his Element

clicks left and fire the last round. All going well I finished up with a nice square box, one round in three corners and two neatly where I started and finished.

As an MRAD scope with 1/10 MIL adjustments (1cm/100m) this exercise should've given me a 10cm square but on measuring it my square was closer to 9cm. Then it dawned on me, my target was set at the 100-yard line, not 100m, as 100 yards equals 90m. 1/10 Mil at 90m = 0.9cm meaning 10 clicks equal 9cm so a 9cm square equals Element Titan tracking perfectly.

I've never been a great advocate for illuminated reticles on high-powered variable riflescopes, purely a personal preference as I own a few such scopes with this feature but never seem to use it. That said, this option certainly works as advertised with the Titan. Likewise the on/off attribute between settings I'm sure will be appreciated by those who do like illumination in their glass. The Element Titan comes in either 3-18x50 or 5-25x56 in both MRAD and MOA variants. There are also four reticle options (2x MOA, 2x MRAD) one being a simpler ballistic type and the other the full Christmas tree. Both are front focal plane scopes as per their FFP designation, meaning the sub-tension values remain the same regardless of magnification.



The Titan on Daniel's Howa 1500.

I also discovered Element carry out a rugged testing regime which not only covers the usual nitrogen purging, water, shock and fog-proofing but tracking and return to zero tests as well as simulated recoil to the value of 1000x1000Gs with each scope technically inspected and individually signed off. Lastly, Element scopes carry a 'Platinum Lifetime Warranty' requiring no registration or proof of purchase.

So when it comes to scopes these days, how do you work out what's what? I look for features, quality of manufacture, lens and components, ability to track and remain consistent and lastly quality assurance and warranty. Seems Element tick all those boxes so the Titan appears to be good value at its price point (less than \$1500) in an otherwise crowded market. More at www.elementoptics.com.au ●



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Going up!

Howa's Carbon Elevate gave Con Kapralos a lift

Howa Manufacturing of Japan together with Fuller Global, owners of Legacy Sports in the US and Outdoor Sporting Agencies (OSA) in Australia, have taken the Howa M1500 platform to new levels. The M1500 barrelled action in ultralight, sporter, semi-heavy and varmint guises is as good as it gets in a superbly engineered and designed rifle platform made in a multitude of calibres.

The use of carbon-fibre technology in the design and manufacture of rifle stocks has been a game changer with the Howa M1500 barrelled actions paired up with excellent carbon-fibre offerings from Stocky's Stocks in the US. The Howa Carbon Stalker (reviewed in March) was the first rifle series released which mated the mini-action and sporter barrelled actions with a carbon-fibre stock weighing 600-700 grams. The resultant rifles are a revelation with their handling transformed and as great as Carbon Stalker rifles are, Howa and Fuller Global didn't rest on their laurels. They were already using a carbon-wrapped barrel, giving a rifle with a varmint (number 7) profile the weight of a standard sporter barrel.

The Howa Carbon Elevate is the result. The mini-action and M1500 receiver with carbon-wrapped barrel delivers the best of both worlds as a sporter and varmint rolled into one, cradled in another Stocky's carbon-fibre stock with a weight well under the 3kg mark, these new offerings set to take on their European competitors in the hotly-contested \$1800-\$2200 price bracket.

At a glance

Australian Shooter received the rifle in two parts, the M1500 action with number 7 profile carbon-wrapped barrel in .308 Winchester in one carton and Stocky's carbon-fibre stock in another, OSA also supplying a Zeiss V4 3-12x56 optic with Nikko Stirling Zero-Lok scope-mounting hardware. Range testing was with a selection of factory hunting loads as well as two favourite handloads using monolithic projectiles. The rifle has an overall length of 1115mm, weighs 2.86kg bare and with the Zeiss V4 optic tipped the scales at 3.7kg.

Barrelled action

The Howa M1500 action has stood the test of time and continues to be made as it was when released in 1979. The receiver is milled from a single piece of cylindrical barstock and maintains this profile except for the top of the rear receiver ring and underside of the frame where it beds on to the stock and a flat surface is warranted. Top of the receiver is drilled and tapped to accept Remington 700-style scope-mounting hardware, a pleasing attribute as it makes mounting easy with a plethora of bases and rings out there.

The ejection/loading port has the user in mind, enabling rounds to be thumbed into the internal box magazine with ejection of cases through the port. The front receiver ring has one gas port on the left, which helps



The review rifle was mated with a Zeiss V4 3-12x56 and tipped the scales at 3.7kg.



Left side of the Howa M1500 receiver with its single gas vent port.

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Going up!

direct hot gases away from the shooter. The left of the receiver body has the model engraved into its surface as well as the Legacy Sports name, a small tab-button on the rear left flank serves as the bolt release while the right flank of the receiver has the serial number on the front ring.

The stock is anchored to the receiver using two hex-head bolts, one just rear of the trigger group and another which anchors into the front recoil lug and is an integral part of the receiver. While many modern rifles have much simpler recoil lugs, the Howa M1500 with its version milled as part of the receiver is as solid as you'll find and lends itself perfectly to further glass bedding if required. The receiver is finished in matte black.

The barrel is one of the Carbon Elevate's major attributes with its stainless-steel construction being of a number 7 profile and 610mm (24") long, akin to a traditional varmint profile. This involves a cold hammer forging process with the muzzle and chamber ends retaining two stainless steel collars. The collar which makes up the Knox-form is 52mm long by 30mm wide and at the terminal end, the steel collar is 18mm long by 20mm wide and has a threaded portion for use with muzzle accessories. A knurled thread cap comes as standard.

The main shank of the barrel is wrapped in carbon-fibre primarily to reduce weight but also aids rigidity and heat dissipation. The carbon wrap ends up being flush with

Specifications

Manufacturer: Howa Manufacturing, Japan

Model: M1500 Carbon Elevate

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

Barrel: Number 7 profile, carbon-wrapped 610mm (24") stainless steel, cold-hammer forged

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

Trigger: Howa H.A.C.T. unit, two-stage adjustable, set at 1.3kg from factory

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, LimbSaver recoil pad

Weight: 2.86kg (bare)

Calibres: Short Action 6.5 Creedmoor, .308 Win (tested); Long Action 6.5 PRC, .300 WM

RRP: About \$1850 but shop around

Distributor: Outdoor Sporting Agencies

The standard Howa M1500 bottom metal is simple to use with no detachable box magazines to worry about.



the two steel collars and gives the look and stability of a traditional varmint-style barrel but at a sporter weight. Calibres available are 6.5 Creedmoor and .308 Winchester in Short Action and 6.5 PRC and .300 Winchester Magnum in Long Action, the review rifle being .308 Winchester with a one-in-10" rate of twist.

Bolt

This 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 with the standard 90-degree lift and case extraction, ejection by the ever-reliable M16-style ejector and extractor. The bolt face is square to the chamber for optimal accuracy and reliability, while the body has several pressure vent holes along its underside to channel ignition gases. The entire bolt, including the rear shroud, is finished in matte black with the exception of the rear-facing cocking indicator which is polished steel.

Trigger, safety and magazine

The safety system is an integral part of the trigger unit and is of a linear three-position arrangement with the selector lever tucked behind the bolt handle notch. Moving the safety lever rearmost the firing pin is blocked and bolt handle locked down, sliding it to the middle the firing pin is still blocked but the bolt may be cycled, while fully forward the rifle can be fired. The trigger is Howa's patented H.A.C.T. (Howa Actuator Controlled Trigger) system designed to eliminate trigger creep and lighten the pull, the two-stage trigger set to roughly 1.3kg from the factory and adjustable.

The magazine is the standard pressed steel internal box with alloy floorplate and polymer follower with steel spring. It holds five .308 Winchester rounds staggered 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 to unload just press the floorplate release lever on the forward portion of the triggerguard. For users who prefer a detachable box magazine set-up, there are some available through OSA.

Stock

The carbon-fibre stock weighs 647 grams and is of an American profile with pleasing lines and no unsightly cheekpieces or raised combs, the barrel channel quite wide to accommodate the carbon-wrapped barrel. Bedding is by the patented AccuBlock lug bed which mates superbly with the integral recoil lug on the front underside of the receiver which allows the barrel to free-float.

An excellent LimbSaver recoil pad is supplied and QD sling swivel studs are standard. The exterior has the carbon-weave pattern visible but is overlaid with white 'spider-webbing' which provides an additional level of grip as no chequering or grip panels are worked into the stock.

At the range

Testing consisted of bore-sighting the rifle at 25m before moving the target frames out to 100m. Factory loads from Hornady, Sellier & Bellot, Federal and two premium handloads with monolithic projectiles would give a good indication of the rifle's accuracy potential. The bore, as always, was thoroughly cleaned before testing.

Left: Stainless-steel barrel with steel collars at the Knox-form and muzzle.

Right: The muzzle thread was superbly cut with the crown retaining a target profile.



The review rifle shot superbly and during years of reviewing firearms, the Howa M1500 has never disappointed in the accuracy stakes. This is a hunting rifle and I wouldn't expect benchrest accuracy, yet they always seem to perform admirably, in this instance average groups with factory ammunition hovering around the Minute-of-Angle mark (28mm at 100m) with some tight groups in the mix. Accuracy really shone through with the handloads using .30-calibre Tigershark monolithic projectiles which are potent on medium to large game species such as deer and feral pigs.



Howa M1500 Carbon Elevate in component form.

Summary

The Howa M1500 has been a success story for OSA in Australia and continues to be a strong seller and the availability of carbon-fibre stocks to suit the barrelled actions

will only strengthen Howa's presence. The Carbon Elevate in selected short and long action calibres makes for a superb light-weight hunting or long-range outfit with

Howa's M1500 precision and reliability inherently built in. RRP is around the \$1850 mark but it pays to shop around. More at www.osaaustralia.com.au



Howa M1500 Carbon Elevate in .308 Winchester: Accuracy testing at 100m

| Ammunition | Best group (mm) | Worst group (mm) | Average group (mm)* |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Federal Power-Shok 150gr SP | 18 | 29 | 24 |
| Hornady InterLock 150gr SP | 20 | 39 | 27 |
| Sellier & Bellot 150gr SPCE | 19 | 36 | 25 |
| Handload – Tigershark 140gr HT | 10 | 19 | 14 |
| Handload – Tigershark 150gr HT | 13 | 24 | 17 |

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

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SSAA bursary award funds chital deer research



Matthew Quin: Chital deer research ongoing.

Chital deer have long been regarded as a pest species in far north Queensland and their expanding ranks heighten the general cause for concern among landowners and the general public. This small to medium-sized animal may have a cute appearance but the reality is the genus has a far murkier side. The chital is reckoned to be one of more than 80 species of non-native vertebrates which have seamlessly established wild populations in Australia, with their presence viewed as one of the key factors contributing to high rates of extinction suffered by native species.

Chital are guilty of causing damage to native vegetation and sensitive ecosystems. The potential competition for grazing resources with cattle and their capacity to act as vectors for disease are at the core of their status as 'persona non grata'. Add to that their encroachment into urban areas and an increase in deer-vehicle collisions and it's clear action is needed to curb this inherent menace. And doing his bit to assist in this is Queensland student Matthew Quin whose post-graduate studies at James Cook University in Townsville - which will hopefully earn him a PhD in Environmental Science - are centred on research into restricting the further range expansion of the chital hordes.

And Matthew's efforts have recently been recognised by the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (SSAA) under the organisation's student bursary scheme, earning him a grant of \$2000 to bolster his ongoing studies. The funding will help cover costs associated with non-deferrable university fees and supplying work-related clothing for undertaking examinations in diverse environments and weather conditions.

The SSAA scheme has been in operation for around a decade and the continued grants enterprise offers tertiary students an opportunity to secure part of an annual \$10,000 bursary to fund their education and simultaneously promote community awareness of conservation and hunting as part of feral animal control.

Matthew has already received the bursary donation which will go a long way to easing his financial burden in testing economic times. "I'm really excited as the money takes the pressure off with fees being covered - it really is a relief," he said. He can now concentrate on progressing his studies and fieldwork which sometimes mean he can be on the road at short notice. "Traditionally these programs take about three-and-a-half years to run and I'm about 18 months into mine," he said. "Hopefully I'll finish up with three or four years of quality data."

The venture has excited Matthew whose earlier analyses were conducted in Victoria. He hails from Benalla so the transition to the Tropics of Queensland has been an eye-opener, though sadly one of the more frequent occurrences is the incidence of road kills involving chital deer and other mammals. "As these species increasingly disperse, they have to cross road networks to achieve what they need," he said, "and not just deer but kangaroos and reptiles too."

Now Matthew has built up a network of contacts so if a deer is downed, people will often inform him of the roadside location. At short notice he's able to scramble into action, track down the carcass and collect tissue samples to process and add to his work, all of which ties into the broader picture of his surveys. The consistent focus is on investigating population demography of chital deer along with dispersal and dietary elements which shape the species' distribution and future expansion, something he hopes to advance to help in developing management protocols.

Matthew's main objectives will be to establish the abundance, offspring and mortality rates of chital deer in Queensland's dry Tropics and following on from this, his aim is to quantify levels of relatedness of chital deer individuals across the dry Tropics and determine the environmental barriers facilitating or inhibiting the species' dispersal and gene flow.

The third plank of Matthew's platform is to detail the species richness of plants in the chital deer diet, concentrating on links between individual dietary quality and overall body condition.

Matthew hopes his work will eventually put into context the invasive species population growth and spread as well as providing implications for global management of said species, especially those introduced and established from small initial populations. All collated data from his project should bolster evidence-based mitigation strategies and allow government agencies, environmental groups and land managers to better foresee invasive species growth rates, which will enable more cost-effective and resource-efficient limitation approaches.

Matthew seems to have found the perfect educational environment to further his research in the Queensland Tropics and is constantly on the lookout for more information from outside sources. If you think you could be of assistance, he can be reached by email at matthew.quin@myjcu.edu.au. And for those students who'd like to follow his lead and feel their studies would merit a cash contribution from the SSAA bursary scheme, email cos@ssaa.org.au for full details. ●



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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

Fly Shoot National Championships

May 5-8, 2023

Eagle Park Range, Victoria

Program: May 5: Practice. May 6: 500m Light Gun. May 7: 500m Heavy Gun. May 8: 200m Rimfire. Facilities: Free camping at range with showers and limited power. Cafe open for breakfast and lunch. Contact: Nick Aagren: nick.aagren@gmail.com

Sporting Shotgun National Championships

May 13-14, 2023

SSAA Hay, NSW

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

Shotgun 5-Stand National Championships

May 20-21, 2023

SSAA Albury, NSW

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

SSAA National Junior Challenge

July 6-9, 2023

SSAA Canberra, ACT

Program: July 6: Pre-registration and practice; July 7: Rimfire Rifle Metallic Silhouette, 10m Scoped Air Rifle (subject to interest); July 8: Rimfire Field Rifle; July 9: 3P Rimfire Rifle. Contact: ssaa.actjds@gmail.com

International Handgun Metallic Silhouette National Championships

September 28-October 6, 2023

Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA

Program: September 28-October 1: Small Bore, Field Pistol. October 2-6: Big Bore. See National website for full line-up. Facilities: Camping available, canteen. Contact: Russell Mowles via email at handgunsilhouette@disciplines.ssaa.org.au

International

International Big Game Rifle Championship

August 25-27, 2023

Mickett Creek Shooting Complex, Darwin, NT

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

NSW

SSAA (NSW) Big Game Rifle State Championships

May 19-21, 2023

Windamere Regional Shooting Complex, NSW

Program: May 19 Set-up and practice; May 20: Rifle events 1-7; May 21: Rifle events 8-11, full program on National website. Facilities: Camping and caravans

permitted at range Friday-Monday, toilets and hot showers. Contact: Ben Doherty 0409 831 258 (A/H) or bfjdoherty@bigpond.com

Qld

Queensland NRA Pistol Metallic Silhouette Postal Shoots

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

SSAA (Qld) 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.

SSAA (Qld) Lever Action State Championships

September 2-3, 2023

SSAA Townsville branch

Program: September 1: Practice. 2: Open match. 3: Classic Calibre match. Facilities: No catering but barbecue available, camping at venue with power, toilets, showers. Contact: Kerry Guinea leveraction@ssaaqld.org.au or 0409 262 966.

SA

SSAA (SA) Rifle Metallic Silhouette Centrefire State Championships

June 24-25, 2023

Monarto Shooting Complex, SA

Program: Saturday 40 shots Rimfire, 40 shots Centrefire Hunter; Sunday: 80 shots Centrefire. Facilities: Event catered and onsite camping. Contact: mmsrcsecretary@gmail.com

SSAA (SA) Fly Shoot State Championships

July 15-16, 2023

Monarto Shooting Complex, SA

Program: July 15: Centrefire 500m Fly, five-target competition plus practice target. July 16: 200yd Rimfire Fly, five-target competition plus practice. Facilities: Barbecue available all weekend, camping permitted (limited power sites), hot showers, toilets and cooking facilities. Contact: Pat 0455 280 024.

Vic

SSAA (Vic) Junior Rimfire Silhouette State Championships

May 21, 2023

Eagle Park Range, Vic

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

SSAA (Vic) Scoped Silhouette State Championships

May 27-28, 2023

Eagle Park Range, Vic

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

SSAA (Vic) Single Action Black Powder State Championships

July 15-16, 2023

Eagle Park Range, Vic

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

SSAA (Vic) Lever Action Silhouette State Championships

September 23-24, 2023

Eagle Park Range, Vic

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

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

October 22, 2023

Eagle Park Range, Vic

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

WA

SSAA (WA) 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@iinet.net.au or Dave 0400 205 892 benchrest@jarrahdalshooters.org.au.

SSAA (WA) Skeet Shotgun State Championships

May 28, 2023

Jarrahdale Sporting Shooters, WA

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

SSAA (WA) Lever Action State Championships

June 2-4, 2023

SSAA Geraldton Branch, WA

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

SSAA (WA) International Rimfire Benchrest State Championships

June 2-4, 2023

Wonthella Shooting Complex, WA

Program: Gates open 6.30am, first detail 9am sharp, competition capped at 42 shooters. Facilities: Food and drink available from canteen, water bottles, tea and coffee for gold coin donation. Friday night burger \$10, Saturday and Sunday night dinner \$30 each. Contact: Ian Filgate 0402 987 171 or Zoe Filgate 0447 775 123.

SSAA (WA) Practical Shooting Shotgun State Championships

June 3, 2023

SSAA Kalgoorlie-Boulder Branch, WA

Program: Eight stages, 125 rounds (competitors will need minimum 25 rounds OO Buckshot SSG and 100 rounds 7½ shot). Facilities: Canteen and barbecue lunch available, camping on-site but no showers, power or water. Contact: Steve Genovese sgenovese@bigpond.com

SSAA (WA) Single Action State Championships

June 3-4, 2023

Leschenault Handgun Club, Parkfield, WA

Program: June 2: Camping available from 1pm; June 3: Six stages; June 4: Six stages. Facilities: Saturday and Sunday lunch, tea and coffee included in entry fee.

Contact: waass.events@gmail.com or phone Meggs 0410 456 898.

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@iinet.net.au.

SSAA (WA) Sporting Clays State Championships

July 30, 2023

Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA

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

SSAA (WA) Shotgun Tower State Championships

September 17, 2023

Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA

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

ACT

SSAA (ACT) Snowball Shoot

June 10-12, 2023

SSAA Majura Range, ACT

Program: June 10: Rimfire 80 shots, Air Rifle 40 shots; June 11: Centrefire 80 shots; June 12: Rimfire Hunting Rifle 40 shots, Centrefire Hunting Rifle 40 shots.

Facilities: Camping on range with water and showers (\$10 per person per night), canteen facilities for the weekend. Contact: Mark 0401 867 839 or email mnl1@live.com.au or Scott 0411 465 254.

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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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SSAA Victoria 2023 AGM notice



2023 Annual General Meeting and postal ballot

The AGM will be held from 2pm to 4pm Sunday, September 24, 2023 - Please check our website at www.ssaavic.com.au for detail and any changes to arrangements.

Nominations to fill four Board vacancies will open May 22, 2023 and close June 23, 2023. Nominations to be posted to **Returning Officer SSAA (Victoria), PO Box 336, Nth Melbourne, VIC 3051**; or emailed to jim@ybg.com.au

Results of the postal ballot, which opens July 31, 2023 and closes August 25, 2023, will be announced at the 2023 AGM.

Financial accounts for the year ending April 2023 will be available at www.ssaavic.com.au prior to the meeting or upon written request.

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

By order of the Board, SSAA Victoria

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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The future inevitably becomes the past

In writing a monthly column I've become aware of one of the more interesting vagrancies of print media. Sometimes you write about the future, yet when it finally arrives in your home mailbox it's the past. So let me explain. It's mid-February and I'm well into my preparations for the red deer Roar.

The Roar (or Rut depending on how you like to describe it) is a predictable, repeatable season in the annual lifecycle of red deer. During the Roar the ghosts of the forest, namely red deer stags, become noisy, bumbling lust-driven dopes, while the hinds adopt a pose not dissimilar to bored young ladies watching the carrying-on of blokes at the pub around closing time on Saturday night.

My preparation for the Roar began in late January (the past) with a visit to the block to lay a pattern of trail cameras. History

tells me I probably wouldn't see a mature stag on camera at this time though I would have a good idea of hind movement and the number of young spiker stags on the block. As it happens that's exactly what unfolded - no mature stags, some hinds and plenty of young spikers.

I'll visit the block again (the future) likely on March 10 to check the cameras and there's a chance I'll see a mature stag on camera but that's only a chance. Sometime before that date I'll travel to New South Wales to hunt, an opportunity to explore new lands and make my gear and myself 'red deer-ready'. If I'm lucky I may even take a fallow deer on that trip.

After that outing I'll leave the block alone until the last days of March and again, history tells me that sometime between March 10 and 31 the stags will begin to roar. Day and night-time temperatures should also drop a little and we might see some rain, possibly quite a heavy downpour. If everything goes to plan, sometime in those last days of March I'll have myself a stag and if not, like last year, I'll plan to take one in mid-to-late April. That consolation stag will be a roughie, a cull animal more for the property owner than me.

Into May and beyond I'll continue to visit the block, checking cameras and adopting a more opportunist approach to hunting until it starts to warm up again in September. And there it is, the past, present and future of my red deer roar in less than 450 words. But why go to all that bother? Well that's a little trickier as each year somewhere along this timeline I reflect on where it all began.

I first gained access to red deer in the Brisbane Valley back in 2008 and the following year got to experience my first

Roar, hunting under the guidance of Paul. With his help I stumbled into a red deer stag, all body mass and large low-quality antlers. I lined up, took the shot and landed it then field-dressed my first red deer and carried it out. Those antlers now adorn the entry to our home.

Ever since that day, deer (red and fallow) have been a big part of my life, though that doesn't really explain the why. Deer is a game species worthy of pursuit, worthy of connection as they provide both opportunity and motivation. Yet they're not the reason, they aren't the why. Ultimately it's about hunting, the pursuit and connection that pursuit creates.

Recently I was guest on a business podcast. The host and I have been friends since childhood so it was inevitable the conversation turned to hunting. We both acknowledged the audience wouldn't be hunters and may, individually at least, be anti-hunting. We pressed on and drifted into a philosophical discussion about hunting and connection. With the benefit of hindsight I probably didn't do a great job of explaining that connection between hunter and game and that's because it's not an easy thing to do. In fact it's damn hard to explain to those who haven't experienced it and tough to ignore by those who have, that connection you build with game when you play for keeps.

So to bring this all together, I hope in coming months to share my future success, read by you as past experience in pursuit of red deer, though I predict that just by being there in late March I'll have already experienced another successful Roar.



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Call (02) 8805 3900
Email: megan@ssaains.com.au



MEMBERS FIREARMS PROTECTION

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