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# AUSTRALIAN Shooter

September 2022  
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THE MAGAZINE FOR SPORTSMEN AND WOMEN SHOOTERS

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- Nikko Stirling Octa illuminated scope
- Accurate Mag 700 flat-top chassis



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## FIREARMS

- 24 **Good all-rounder**  
Mauser's M18 Feldjagd has it all, says Con Kapralos
- 44 **Balancing act**  
Webley & Scotts 900XS delighted Paul Miller
- 64 **Good as new**  
Refurbishing a Winchester .30-06 a winner for John McDougall

## HUNTING

- 34 **Partridge family**  
As Simon Barr discovered, shooting game birds in the Scottish Borders is a memorable day out

## PRODUCTS

- 50 **Octa illuminated riflescope**
- 73 **Aguila mini-shells**
- 75 **Accurate Mag 700 chassis**

## AND MORE

- 18 **Buying used firearms**  
Second-hand or second best?
- 22 **That's a belt-er**  
Spotlighting feral pigs threw up the unexpected for Joe Norris
- 30 **SSAA-LA**  
Ammo-marking debate still missing the mark
- 40 **Ground-breaking quail study validates SA hunting season**
- 54 **Quail of a time**  
Speedy game birds worthy of your attention, says Leon Wright
- 60 **Snakes alive!**  
Seasoned hunter Sam Garro recalls some close encounters of the fanged variety
- 68 **Australia likely to follow US in military hardware**
- 71 **Winchester Australia and the post-pandemic market**

## REGULARS

- 6 National News
- 7 Letters
- 7 Insurance Q&A
- 8 Open Season
- 10 Reloading
- 12 Clay Target Q&A
- 14 Top Shots
- 77 SSAA Shop
- 78 Competition News
- 81 Competitions
- 82 Jumbunna



Our September cover - see page 34

# NEXT ISSUE

The latest rifle from CZ is the 457 Beech Wood, a bolt-action repeater with a sporter profile and its interchangeable barrel capacity makes it possible to extract the best from your rimfire rifle. As our reviewer noted: "This is one any small-game hunter or shooter would be proud to own."

Experienced shooter John Hill advocates barrel slugging as the surest way of finding everything you need to know about the condition of a rifle bore. While the combination of a borescope and slugging will provide a complete picture, he says the price of a borescope will deter many shooters yet slugging a barrel not only tells whether or not the bore is parallel, it also gives the groove diameter of the rifling.

The Beretta 687 Diamond Pigeon is a well-designed, well-tuned and spectacular shotgun to look at and according to John McDougall: "Anyone in the market for a versatile shotgun which smashes clays with its steelium barrels and Optima choke tube combination will find it hard to beat and, coupled with Beretta's 'Forever' service arrangement and personal fitting, it offers excellent value for discerning shooters."



24



54



60





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# AUSTRALIAN Shooter

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The 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games have come and gone with the notable absence of shooting from the line-up, this despite the sport having been part of every Games since 1966 in Kingston, Jamaica (except for 1970). We were given warning of this back in 2018 when this year's host country was confirmed but a lot of water has flowed under the bridge since then. To the general public it may not seem that important but to the firearms community there's an underlying concern this could set a precedent in excluding shooting from future Games line-ups.

For that reason the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia is excited to throw its support behind Shooting Australia's bid to have target shooting included in the Victoria 2026 Commonwealth Games. Our 211,000-plus members across Australia form a significant portion of the target shooting community in this country, with a number of notable elite shooters including James Willett, Katarina Kowplos and SSAA columnist Latiesha Scanlan hailing from our ranks.

Shooting has the potential to be included in the sports program for the Victoria 2026 Commonwealth Games via a formal submission and show of support from the shooting community. SSAA members can join the Shoot for the Games 2026 chorus on social media and share why their sport deserves to be included in the 2026 line-up by using #ShootForTheGames2026 and #commonwealthgames2026 when posting and tag both @CommGamesAus and @shootingaustralia. We look forward to hearing the outcome of Shooting Australia's efforts and have high hopes of good news.



SSAA columnist and member Latiesha Scanlan is a Commonwealth Games triple gold medallist.

Meanwhile an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in Indonesia and increased risk for Australia presents a timely reminder to hunters. FMD is a highly contagious viral infection of animals and one of the most serious livestock diseases which can be transmitted through clothing, equipment and footwear.

SSAA members entering properties as hunters are performing an important role and must be aware of biosecurity protocol. Farm biosecurity should be the primary concern of all visitors to agricultural properties and National Parks to prevent any number of diseases, pests and weeds potentially decimating Australia's industries and environments. For more information on farm biosecurity best practice considerations, visit the SSAA Farmer Assist website at [farmerassist.com.au](http://farmerassist.com.au).

## Slithery omission

AS A GRAZIER, firearms user and SSAA member I'd like to comment on the article 'Long Story' by Douglas Riach (*Shooter*, July 2022). I completely agree with the sentiment except for one major omission - snakes. The ones here can kill very quickly and even with the best medical attention, preceded by the most thorough first aid, victims often suffer lifelong organ function issues and other debilitating symptoms.

If hunters (whom the article's aimed at) wear thin 'airflow' trousers which are becoming so popular, an Eastern or Western Brown Snake or one of the common Taipan varieties can easily bite through these

flimsy garments and even 'normal weight' workwear trousers give no guarantee a snake won't get in a full-depth bite. My wife, a nurse, has seen bites through these type of trousers where the fangs haven't managed to pierce the full skin thickness due to strong pants being worn.

Gaiters aren't to be laughed at and thin, airflow-type hunting trousers are inadequate for the most deadly creatures most hunters will encounter here - short-fanged land snakes. They shouldn't be recommended in an article denigrating shorts used by hunters and rural people for not being adequate, which Douglas is right

about. As hot as good, thick trousers or gaiters are, when alone in the bush disregarding them in favour of thin pants full of air holes is a bad idea which could result in death or lifelong debilitation.

### Grant Walterfang, via email

• Fear not Grant, turn to Page 60 where Sam Garro has address the subject in detail - Editor.

## Razor-sharp service

WHILE WE OFTEN complain about poor service, I want instead to praise the impressive service from Total Knife Care (TKC), importer of the Nirey electric knife-sharpener range. About six years ago I bought a KE-3000 machine which failed late last year when well out of warranty so I sent it to TKC to be repaired and it was returned to me free of charge. A few months later the unit failed again and was sent back for a further repair.

Luke at TKC advised he'd return the sharpener to the manufacturer and immediately dispatched a new upgraded KE-280 unit to me free of charge. I was pleasantly surprised and can once again keep all our knives razor-sharp as they must be. Be advised I have no commercial association with TKC except for the event described.

Barry Batagol, Vic



## Insurance Q&A

SSAA GENERAL INSURANCE BROKERS

Send questions to: [insurance@ssaaains.com.au](mailto:insurance@ssaaains.com.au)



**Q** I've started receiving renewal notices for my insurances and feel the right thing to do is review my options and shop around but I don't know where to start. Any advice?

**A** It's a big job to start reviewing your insurances. A lot of people are happy to let their policies roll over so it's good you're keen to take a look at some options. The reality is the average person doesn't usually read policies or understand their terms and

conditions and this can leave them at risk when it comes to conditions around limits and sub-limits, items which are included or excluded and waiting periods.

It's worth considering using an insurance broker to help with your review. SSAA Insurance Brokers works with you to find out your needs and how your cover should be structured and the team then does the leg work, researches your options and talks you through how their recommendations fit with your car, home and contents, farm

or even business. This is also useful if you ever need to make a claim as the team can complete the paperwork with you and deal with insurance companies on your behalf. As this advice is of a general nature, for more information contact SSAA Insurance Brokers on 1800 808 608 or visit [ssaaib.com.au](http://ssaaib.com.au)



## Farmer Assist program a big hit with landholders

In late July I sent a survey to landholders who'd registered for our SSAA Farmer Assist program during the past few years. In all, 565 invitations were sent to participants prompting a total of 139 replies and with a response rate of roughly 25 per cent this was a good result from which to draw some useful information.

When asked how they first learned about the program 35 per cent said 'word of mouth', 23 per cent 'internet search', 8.5 per cent through 'farmers group' and 7 per cent via 'social media'. Since launching this program we've always known the 'Bush Telegraph' would be a significant source of referrals and now we have more data to support that. Our website is performing well to provide organic search traffic and creating job listings and by developing more interactions with farmers groups and using social media we hope we can further drive listing growth. Data showed the return on investment from past advertising through flyers in the mail, newspaper advertisement and radio had a lower impact than internet-based options.

We were able to identify what pest species were presenting the biggest issues to landholders with number one being kangaroos at 57 per cent, foxes (47), feral pigs (41), wild dogs (28) and rabbits (22). Surprisingly at only 5 per cent, wild deer after all the recent media coverage about them being an emerging pest over-running the country didn't make the top five and only just scraped in to the top 10 behind feral cats (21 per cent), hares (10) and pest birds (5).

Turning to the nuts and bolts of the survey with regard to how landholders perceived its operation and performance, 93 per cent said it met or exceeded their expectations, a very positive result and one we can all be proud of. I contacted those few respondents who felt the program was below expectations to determine why, so I could develop ways to overcome this in future. When responding to a question regarding the speed at which our members responded to their request for help, 99 per cent were happy which highlights the program's effectiveness in providing farmers with access to motivated members who'll engage quickly to provide assistance.

Farmers also suggested 99 per cent of our members followed their directions and instructions while visiting the property, indicating the vast majority of participants are highly engaged in performing the tasks farmers need done. Overall, 96 per cent of farmers rated the performance of our program as helpful and 89 per cent said they'd use the same selected members again. And while the survey highlighted some members' inexperience (though not enthusiasm) did impact their performance, with education we can increase their skill base.

When asked if they'd recommend the program to others, 94 per cent said they would. The website portal (Jobs Board) was deemed easy to use by 88 per cent of farmers which shows recent improvements have created a better experience though there's still work to be done to keep improving it. The Farmer Assist website was also given the thumbs-up with 91 per cent agreeing



it was helpful in explaining the program, the process to enlist assistance and how to manage replies to listings.

The average number of times our members visited a property over a yearly period was seven with an average of three day/nights in attendance which gives a typical stay of 21 days' effort per year to assist with pest control, a significant investment in both time and resources by our members. An assessment of the data received shows the program is doing what it's intended to do - offer assistance to any farmer in need. We'll continue to review feedback in an effort to improve the program and spread the word further through the 'Bush Telegraph' and beyond.

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## Brass cartridge case maintenance

Let's take a look at the most important item in any reloading process - the brass cartridge case - and the best ones to reload are either new from the factory or those which have been fired only a couple of times. Cases which have been used quite a few times can have enlarged primer pockets that may cause pitting of the bolt face when the gun is fired, or thinning walls that may split and come apart just forward of the head when fired.

The latter leaves the front part of the cartridge case stuck in the chamber and can be a real chore to remove, especially if you're out hunting and don't have the equipment to extract the stuck case, so on trips away I always carry a suitably sized round file for this very scenario. I remove the rifle bolt and push the file through the breech and into the offending cartridge neck, twist it until it takes hold in the stuck case then wriggle it a bit to loosen the cartridge's grip in the chamber and pull it out. Sometimes the cartridge is so tightly held in the chamber it must be knocked out by pushing a cleaning rod through the muzzle to touch the end of the file, which is lodged firmly in the cartridge case, then gently tapped until the cartridge lets go.

Next we check cases for excessive length using calipers or the appropriate cartridge length gauge and if they're over-length they should be cut back to standard using a case trimmer. Another item which needs attention is the primer pocket as after each firing a small deposit of powder remains in the pocket, so after the primer is removed it can be cleaned out using a commercial primer pocket cleaner like those made by



Lee Precision or RCBS. After the primer pocket has been cleaned the new primer will fit nicely down into the bottom of the pocket and reliable ignition will occur when the firearm is discharged. The primer when seated properly should be slightly below the cartridge base and running your finger over the primer to check it's indented assures us that it's correctly seated.

Opening the case mouth just a touch when resizing the cartridge case is another good tip as it allows the new projectile easy access and helps keep it in line with the neck during the seating process. Also inspect the case neck at this time to ensure it has no splits - lightly used cases shouldn't have a problem but if cracks are present it usually means the case life is over and should be discarded. Of course cartridge

cases must be clean and free of dirt or grit which can wear or damage the reloading dies so it's a good idea to wash them in warm soapy water for a few minutes and allow them to dry naturally in the sun. If a large number of cases need cleaning then a case tumbler can be a great help. Cases are placed in the tumbler which contains cleaning media such as crushed walnut shells then vibrated or 'tumbled' to both clean and polish the cases at the same time.

As a note of caution, after tumbling always inspect the primer pocket of the cartridge to ensure there aren't any small particles of cleaning media jammed in the flash hole as this can lead to ignition problems if they're not removed.



AUSTRALIAN  
**WOMEN'S SHOOTER**

- New mum Michelle finds comfort in returning to nature and feral pest control
- Coober Pedy Junior Top Gun
- Performance plateaus – learning curves a part of shooting
- Hunting & fishing as a family

**Issue 16 inside members' Australian Shooter this month and online at [ssaa.org.au/women](http://ssaa.org.au/women)**



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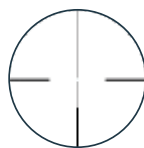
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**Q** I was interested in your article earlier this year about how there's been a trend among many Sporting Clay competitors of recent times towards using stocks made for Trap shooting on their sporting shotguns. You mentioned this is because many competitors now understand it's an advantage to have a higher-shooting shotgun so they can see the target above their barrels all the time. I understand the theory here but recently tried a genuine Monte Carlo Trap stock on my Beretta 682 Sporting shotgun and really struggled. In all honesty I saw the targets worse, even blurred. My traditional sporting stock was twice as effective as I could see the targets better. Can you explain this?

**Jonathon Brown, Vic.**

**A** It's a rash generalisation to suggest all successful sporting shooters in recent years have swapped to Trap stocks on their shotguns as this simply isn't true. There are still plenty of successful Sporting Clay shooters around the world winning major titles with shotguns whose point of impact is just marginally above or even parallel to their point of aim. By this I mean their shotguns are throwing shot patterns 50 per cent (or close to it) above and 50 per cent below their aiming point. In Trap shooting that's considered very low as 60-70 per cent all the way up to 100 per cent high shot patterns is commonplace in this discipline. You have to find what's best for you and this can often depend on age, technique and of course experience.

The answer to your question as to why targets appeared blurry when you used a genuine Trap Monte Carlo stock is far more

technical and an issue often sadly overlooked by many shotgun shooters and, more importantly, inexperienced stock-makers. A traditional Monte Carlo Trap stock (as covered in this column last month) has a comb that's parallel to the barrel and by this I'm referring to the angle from the front to the back of the comb being the same angle as the barrel of the shotgun (historically this angle is zero). Yet for many people - and I'm willing to bet you're one of them - this angle causes the comb of the stock not to fit comfortably or correctly under the cheekbone, thus letting your head fall down on the comb instead of being supported upright.

If your face is pushed down on the comb this may cause incorrect positioning of your eyes which in my opinion leads to one of the biggest problems in shotgun shooting. It causes you to look through the top portion of your eyes as your head has fallen forward on the comb and as a result what happens is exactly what you experienced. Blurred vision leads to poor target acquisition and the only way out of this is to bring your head off the stock in an attempt to see the target better which of course leads to arguably the second worse habit in our sport. Lifting your head to try and see the target better while in the process of making your shot is a habit which can only lead to inconsistent and inaccurate shooting.

Your traditional Sporting stock would have about 20mm difference in height (measured by running a ruler from the barrels over the top of your stock and measuring downwards to the top of the comb) from the front of the comb and measuring again at the heel. A common Sporting stock dimen-

sion would be roughly 40mm at the front of the comb and around 60mm at the back.

This difference in measurement is what's called 'drop' and 20mm of drop produces quite an angle and, for lots of shotgunners, will fit under your cheekbone much better and keep your head more erect to allow better target acquisition. The trade-off is more drop generally produces more 'cheek slap' and perceived recoil to your face but if it means seeing your target better then it may be a matter of a little pain for lots of gain. You certainly can't shoot what you can't see.

This measurement or angle of drop varies from person to person as everyone tends to have a slightly different cheekbone structure but is a measurement worth experimenting with as you need to find what's right for you. As you evolve your technique you may find you'll add or subtract your drop dimensions and if lucky enough to have an adjustable comb on your shotgun, that allows you to not only change height and cast of your comb but also the amount of drop so you should be able to find what works for you pretty quickly. Certainly consider this if looking to add an after-market adjustable comb to your shotgun as many of the cheap and nasty ones won't be engineered in a way that'll allow you to do this.



**Questions to:**  
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# Got a question - ask our **TOP SHOTS?**

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

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**Q** I have a double-barrelled .410 with a very unusual breech system I believe was made in Belgium (see photos). Unfortunately ill health is forcing me to sell off my firearms so if you could shed any light on this old gun and perhaps give me an indication of value I'd be much obliged.

**Tony Webster, via email**

**A** Sorry to hear you're not in good health and must rehome your firearms Tony. Your gun does have an unusual loading system with its tilt-upwards breech block. To answer your questions: Joseph Tholet was a reasonably well-known gun-maker in Liege between the late 1880s and 1900 after which his firm appears to have been bought by the Liege consortium. I recently helped arrange an auction which included a single-barrel .410 by Joseph Tholet which had been bought by a now-deceased friend back in 1965 or thereabouts. That one sold for \$140 in 2017. An Australian Fine Arms auction held in February this year listed an identical gun but in poorer condition than yours which fetched \$250. I hope this is of help.

**Geoff Smith**



**Q** I'm looking for some direction and professional and personal opinions on first focal plane and second focal plane scopes. I feel I now have a decent understanding of the two, having been shooting for a number of years and recently learned the difference between them. My question is: What would be better for hunting as it has me completely perplexed as to what to put on my new Lithgow LA102 .308 that'll be used as a bit of an all-rounder? I plan on using it for my first deer hunt next year so any tips and advice greatly appreciated as I'd rather avoid buying two scopes just to see what I prefer.

**Adrian Griffiths, via email**

**A** As I'm sure you're aware the main difference between the two is how the reticule behaves as magnification is cranked up or down. In first focal plane scopes (FFP) the reticule size increases with magnification while in the second focal plane (SFP) the reticule stays the same while the apparent size of the target increases. The centre of the cross-hairs remains exactly the same with both.

In FFP scopes with holdover points for longer ranges the value for each point is usually established at the highest magnification and remains the same as magnification is decreased. In SFP scopes the spacings for holdover are only correct at the highest magnification with values decreasing as the magnification is wound down. The new values can be calculated but for an old-fashioned hunter like me it all sounds like too much trouble.

I have hunting rifles fitted with both FFP and SFP reticules and have never experienced problems with either, simply because I don't worry about it. For the deer hunting I do it really doesn't matter given I rarely shoot at anything much over 200m anyway. For your Lithgow .308 I suggest a quality 1.5-6x or 3-9x scope with either style of reticule is all you need for hunting. Sight it in for 200m at the highest magnification, don't be hung up on the technicalities then go out and enjoy yourself.

**John Dunn**



**Q** I've been gifted an A.H. Fox Sterlingworth shotgun in 12-gauge which is in general good condition except for some corrosion on the last 12" of the left barrel. I'd like your opinion on the safety of using this gun with modern ammo and if there's any method for refurbishing the barrel.

**Jim Callen, via email**



**A** Your A.H. Fox Sterlingworth is the economy grade of Fox shotguns but highly regarded nonetheless. There were various grades of the higher-end A.H. Fox guns depending on wood quality and engraving (A B C etc) and these can sell for eyewatering sums, especially in America. I believe Savage took over the company around the 1930s and then made the Sterlingworth as a much more affordable gun.

You'll need to visit a gunsmith for a professional opinion on this pitting and whether it renders the gun unsafe to fire (it looks pretty deep from the photo). It's possible to sleeve barrels internally to make them proof-safe but this is usually only worthwhile doing on valuable firearms as it's a very expensive procedure in that you're effectively putting another barrel inside the old tube.

Depending on the depth of pitting it's certainly possible to remove and restore the barrel surface by various methods but they're also very time-consuming and costly if you're engaging a suitably qualified gunsmith. You must ensure the barrel still maintains a certain depth to contain the pressures of the shot load and gases traveling through it. Fingers crossed your gunsmith thinks it's safe to fire though whether you feel it's worth the expense of fixing and re-blueing the barrels will be up to you. If it has sentimental value as a family heirloom it very well may be.

**Paul Miller**

**Q** I'm looking for reloading data for a single-barrel Ishapore .410 shotgun. The case I want to use is Bertram .375 2½" which I have. I also have Winchester large rifle primers and some No.5 and No.9 shot but am unsure about the powder and charge (I have to hand AR2209 and Winchester 540 and WST powders). To take up some space in the case, as a wad I was going to punch out some felt mat to the correct size then top it off with some stiff cardboard or plastic glued into place. Any advice appreciated as it would be great to have it firing again.

**Sarah Cusinato, via email**

**A** I hadn't heard of the .375 case being used to make .410 brass as the .303 British case was always the popular substitute in Australia and readily available. If fire-forming brass use new, softer cases rather than old work-hardened brass - Bertram, CBC and others make brass specifically for .410 shotshells and is readily available.

Using the components you've listed I suggest half an ounce (or 14 grams) of No.9 shot rather than the larger No.5 though I doubt you'll be able to find loading data for Winchester 540 powder as it hasn't been made for years and WST, while suitable for 12-gauge loads, is a little fast-burning for the .410 while the AR2209 is far too slow and therefore not suitable either.

The ADI reloading manual quotes a load of 14 grains of AR2205 powder (which is



currently available). Work up from say 10 grains but remember this is the load recommended when using plastic hulls and shotgun primers. Winchester produce a plastic one-piece wad (WAA410) for reloaders though I'd use caution as these are intended for plastic hulls and not brass cases. Alternatively non-plastic wads are available online from suppliers such as Ballistic Products. Ideally a wad over the powder of .430" diameter then a fibre cushion wad about .50" thick and .350" diameter and finally an over-shot wad or card of .350".

Making your plastic over-shot wad out of ice cream container plastic should be fine if you have the correct wad punch and either glue or roll-crimp it in place. Large pistol rather than large rifle seem to be the preferred primers for this load though I must stress again this is experimental and you should work up a load gradually and watch for pressure signs.

**Rod Pascoe**







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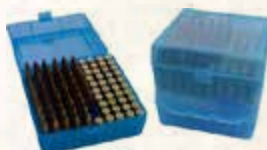
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This BSA Monarch's bore was damaged due to a stuck bullet.

# Second-hand or second best?

Beware pitfalls of the used gun market, advises John Hill

I received a phone call from a shooter asking if I could do a muzzle-crowning job on a friend's inaccurate rifle. I agreed and the owner duly arrived with an old BSA Monarch chambered for .222 Remington. BSA rifles were reasonably popular during the 1970s and '80s and many are still in use. I could see why the muzzle needed crowning as someone had already had a go and although done in a lathe, it was a mess. The muzzle end of the barrel had been attacked with a drill then followed up with a blunt cutting tool of the wrong shape so the muzzle looked a horribly chewed-up affair. Anyway, I told the owner his barrel could be salvaged and I only wish I'd photographed the muzzle.

It was easy to set up the rifle barrel in my lathe, turn off the distorted end and recrown the muzzle. When a rifle muzzle is recrowned in a lathe, small amounts of metal swarf end up in the barrel so a clean-out is required and it was during removal of the swarf I discovered the rifling was severely damaged about halfway down the bore. I came to the conclusion the original muzzle may have been okay and the impaired rifling was the cause of the inaccuracy.

The rifling had numerous dents which indicated removal of a stuck bullet with a steel rod and several blows with a hammer. The rod must have been of a small diameter, wedging itself between the nose of the bullet and the rifling and doing much harm


in the process. Something I fail to understand is the fact this BSA rifle was bought second-hand and if the new owner had looked through the bore he just might have noticed the poor state of the rifling. So after firing a few shots to convince himself the rifle was still inaccurate, he went looking for a replacement.

I'm not sure how he moved on to his next rifle but he bought a second-hand .22-250 Stevens 200 complete with scope and mounts, the worrying part of this purchase being the rifle came from interstate, sight unseen. When I buy a rifle, especially second-hand, I must inspect it myself and while it may be my suspicious nature, I wouldn't trust an unknown seller's opinion. Fortunately the Stevens seemed to be fine, unmarked with the bore unblemished. I did a trigger job and its new owner was pleased

with his latest acquisition until for no apparent reason, disaster struck.

The voice on the phone explained the Stevens had jammed, the bolt wouldn't open and the chamber was loaded with a live round. I suggested the chambered cartridge be fired so as to make the rifle safe but was told the trigger had also jammed and wouldn't operate. As the action couldn't be opened or the rifle fired, would I take a look? I didn't like the idea of a permanently loaded rifle so I agreed to check it out. It was a problem I'd never encountered before and I couldn't imagine how the action and trigger could seize up that way. Perhaps my trigger job had something to do with it.

When the Stevens arrived I placed it in my cleaning cradle, pointed the muzzle in a safe direction and gave the rifle a close



The BSA Monarch's muzzle after recrowning.



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## Second-hand or second best?

visual inspection. Yes, I thought, I can easily fix this. I pushed the safety catch forward to the fire position, opened the bolt and withdrew the loaded round from the chamber. Even a budget-type rifle like the Stevens 200 locks both bolt and trigger when the safety's engaged so it's always a good idea to become familiar with a new firearm and how it functions.

A friend of mine is keen on buying rifles at auction and showed me his latest purchase, a ZKW 465 Model Brno .22 Hornet which had been rebarrelled to .17 Ackley Hornet. The overall external appearance of the rifle was good but there wasn't a trace of rifling for the first centimetre or so of the bore immediately in front of the chamber. In other words the barrel was completely shot out and needed either replacing or shortening from the breech end and, whatever method was chosen, it would be expensive. The Brno was not a good buy.

So once again a closer inspection of the rifle would've revealed this erosion problem and any sensible person wouldn't have bought it. In this instance the buyer had been looking for such a rifle and became carried away when he saw one at auction. He finally disposed of the Brno and bought a .17 Hornet which was a satisfactory replacement. That's the big advantage when buying new, the barrel isn't likely to be damaged and while a new rifle may cost more, it could be far cheaper than having to re-barrel a second-hand purchase.

My worst experience in a second-hand rifle was with a Chinese-made Brno look-alike which I bought mainly to write about. The idea was to buy a cheap rifle and have it shoot really well but the project had to be abandoned as the bore was considerably bell-mouthed (larger at the muzzle by 0.04mm), the oversized chamber often spat back at me, the trigger didn't respond to tweaking and various items which



should've been case hardened were not. But that was a long time ago so hopefully quality has improved, nevertheless that rifle taught me a valuable lesson about only getting what you pay for and price is often a good guide to quality.

Another example was when my brother Alan was interested in buying an old single-barrelled shotgun and was given half a dozen cartridges to try it out. The gun had no front sight and so was a bit vague in the pointing department which only resulted in one rabbit for the six cartridges. Alan decided to return the shotgun and when he did he asked: "Why no front sight?" The gun had been used to despatch a wounded fox by placing the muzzle firmly against the animal's skull, resulting in a bulged muzzle and horrible mess. The muzzle was shortened to remove the bulge with the loss of the choke and fore-sight at the end of the barrel. Not everyone wants to buy a single-barrel shotgun with a true cylinder bore and missing fore-sight - and neither did Alan.

Yet not all second-hand firearms are potential disasters waiting to happen. I know of a young shooter who bought most of his rifles second-hand and all have been excellent.

He started with a CZ chambered for .222 Remington from me followed by a Krico .22 Rimfire Magnum which was a quality rifle in good condition at a reasonable price. Sadly it was in the cabin of his ute when he rolled it while chasing a fox one night which resulted in the scope and mounts being wrenched from the receiver, otherwise the Krico survived reasonably well.

That same young shooter also bought a near-new .22-250 Savage Axis with a Timney trigger already fitted for just \$400. Real bargains can be found if you're clued up but generally the better firearms come from shooters you know and not from gunshops where you pay more for worn out trade-ins and commissioned sales.

My latest second-hand firearm is a 73-year-old Brno .22 Hornet in mint condition with not a single scratch on the stock. If you're careful, buying second-hand can land some excellent firearms but bear in mind there are many lemons in the used gun market and it's often difficult to sort out the good from the bad without actually firing them. A scruffy-looking rifle can be in decent condition while some well-presented ones can have shot-out barrels, it depends entirely on how they're used.

No doubt there are many horror stories when it comes to buying second-hand guns as it's not unlike buying a used car - it's a matter of buyer beware. So if you're considering a used shotgun or rifle, particularly one that looks new and irresistible, scan it thoroughly as owners often have reasons for selling which may not be in your interest as a potential buyer.

If at all possible try before you buy as firing a rifle over a secure rest at a paper target will soon reveal any shortcomings a visual inspection may have overlooked. Likewise with a shotgun - if it doesn't pattern where it aims, don't buy and it's also a good idea to have a mate or even a gunsmith give a second opinion. ●







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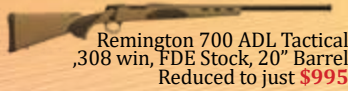


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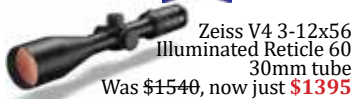
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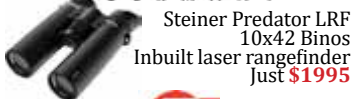
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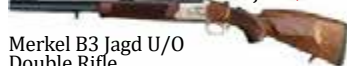
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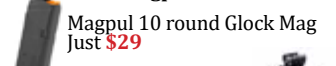
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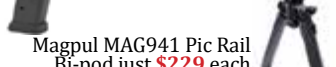
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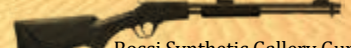
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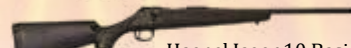
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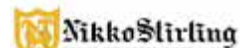
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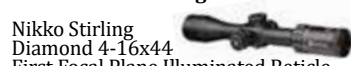
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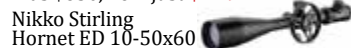
Nikko Stirling Clearance



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The belt has disappeared into the pig's back.

# That's a belt-er

## Spotlighting feral pigs threw up the unexpected for Joe Norris

**T**he onsite rubbish landfill was being visited nightly by a marauding mob of feral pigs and my boss wanted them disposed of due to the health and safety risk to his workforce. Fortunately the boss knew I was a hunter and asked me to do something about the problem so with a long weekend approaching, I made plans to spotlight the offending animals on the Saturday night as by then they'd have been undisturbed since Friday afternoon. When I told the boss of my plans he was keen to come along and with Rod being ex-military and no stranger to firearms I welcomed him.

Having two people meant one of us would work the spotlight while the other used my .243 rifle. I picked Rod up at about 10pm and we drove to the landfill site, stopping some distance from the area to set up the Lightforce spotlight. I asked Rod if he wanted to spotlight or shoot and he opted for the latter so I took the light as we rolled into the big pit that was our landfill. Keeping the hole on the passenger side to allow Rod an unobstructed view of the waste dump, I did my best to hold the

light on the rubbish and the big mob of pigs rooting it up.

As these pigs had never been shot at before they were unconcerned by the vehicle slowly driving along the top of the waste hole and continued to dig around in the rubbish as we stopped and I trained the light on the largest one I could see. Rod chambered a round in the Ruger .243 and aimed at the pig in the centre of the beam. With the shot the big pig collapsed on the spot as the rest of them took off for the safety of nearby scrub and as they ran I tried to hold the light on the fleeing mob as Rod kept shooting until the rifle was empty.

I was pretty sure he'd hit four of the five he shot at so we grabbed our torches and after reloading the rifle headed off along the pig pad the fleeing mob had taken when they exited the dump. The first one had died on the spot and we found the next two corpses close to where they were hit on the pad as we walked the pigs' escape route. I felt sure another one had been hit so continued along the pad for another 50m and found blood. With proof we had another one to trace we followed the blood trail and



on rounding a bend in the scrub picked out the dark shape of a dead porker in our torch beams.

Yet something didn't look right and on closer inspection I was astonished to see it had a fan belt around its shoulders. The pig must have stepped through the belt in its younger days as the belt had become caught between its front legs and over its back. The animal had clearly grown a lot since it stepped into the belt as it had almost disappeared into the pig's back and the skin was starting to grow around the belt on its neck.

We tried to remove it but couldn't so I took some photos as it was something I'd never seen before. I'm confident the belt would've crippled the pig eventually and there's no way it could've removed it on its own so it seems we did it a favour. Still, it's not every day you see a feral pig wearing a belt. ●



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# Good all-rounder

Mauser's M18 Feldjagd has it all, says Con Kapralos

**D**iversifying a rifle model line is something firearms manufacturers have been doing for decades but whereas in years gone by producers would offer a blued or stainless barrelled action with either a walnut or synthetic stock, advances in materials sciences and metal finishing has led to an expansion in longarm development technology. Nowadays barrelled action processes, metal finishes (Cerakoting being a notable standout) along with ongoing advances in stock-making with glass-filled polymer, fibreglass, aluminium and carbon-fibre are to the fore.

It's not uncommon to see up to a dozen variants of a single rifle model being marketed, some with a simple change in cosmetics and others completely redesigned to the point where the receiver is the sole identifying component. Everything else is hi-tech with carbon-fibre barrels and aluminium chassis two of the custom components used.

Outdoor Sporting Agencies sent *Australian Shooter* two Mauser M18 rifles in .223 Remington - the Stainless (reviewed last month) and Feldjagd ('Hunting in the Fields'), both hunting rifles in the sporter guise. They share the same action and magazine set-up but the stock and barrel

are different. The M18 Feldjagd is in the spotlight here and came supplied with a fine optic in the new Nikko Stirling Octa 3-24x56 with Nikko Stirling Zero Lok scope mounting hardware.

## At a glance

The Mauser M18 Feldjagd is a full-size bolt-action repeater with push-feed action and semi-heavy sporter-weight fluted barrel. The receiver and barrel are made of chrome molybdenum steel and finished in

matte black, mated to a savannah-coloured polymer stock with adjustable Kalix cheek-piece. The .223 Remington calibre has a four-shot detachable box magazine, the bare rifle weighing 3.28kg with overall length of 1060mm.

## Receiver

The receiver is made of cylindrical steel bar-stock and maintains a rounded profile in the milled unit with the exception of a flat segment halfway across the bridge between



Receiver sans stock showing trigger unit and stock retaining studs.





The rifle with Nikko Stirling Octa 3-24x56 scope as supplied.



the front and rear receiver rings. An ejection port permits unhindered discharge of cases from the action and is sufficiently enclosed to keep out any unwanted debris. The receiver top is drilled and tapped to accept Remington 700-style bases or any other scope-mounting attachments using the mounting pattern.

The left of the receiver has minimal fanfare with only the serial number engraved into the surface and the bolt-release lever at the rear flank. On the other side the receiver ring carries the Mauser logo, country and year of manufacture and proof marks. The underside of the receiver maintains the circular dimensions with a cut-out to accept the magazine as well as a slot milled into the base of the front receiver ring which mates with a steel recoil lug in the floor of the stock just behind the front bedding screw, the trigger group fixed to the receiver body directly behind the magazine cut-out.

#### Barrel

This is tailored to the nature of the rifle, being hunting and long-range application. It's 560mm long (620mm for magnum calibres) but being cold hammer forged from chrome moly steel, it has a 19mm diameter at the muzzle and a series of flutes along the



The triggerguard is integral to the stock design but allows ample access to the trigger blade.



The semi-heavy sporter barrel with fluting along its length is one of the best on a factory-made sporting rifle.

length. Fluting does lower the barrel weight slightly and also increases the surface area, permitting faster cooling when its heats up.

At the muzzle end an M17x1 thread makes the rifle suitable for accessories such as muzzle brakes. While many factory-made rifles in .223 Remington gravitate towards faster twist barrels such as 8 and 9 twist to

handle longer and heavier projectiles, the Mauser M18 group offers a one-in-10 twist which will help stabilise projectile weights up to 70 grains without a problem. The barrel was cleaned thoroughly before use and for a modern rifle suited to hunting and long-range shooting, it's one of the best I've reviewed in a while.



## Good all-rounder

### Bolt

The substantial round-bolt body is 182mm long and 19mm wide with a three-lugged bolt head permitting a 60-degree lift and smooth travel. Case removal is via two plunger ejectors through the bolt face and a claw extractor recessed into one of the locking lugs. The rear of the bolt has a separate steel shank that accepts the straight steel bolt handle which features a generous polymer knob.

The bolt is finished with a polymer shroud which has a recessed segment to allow visual inspection of whether the firing pin is cocked or uncocked, a red collar showing the bolt being cocked. The bolt is easily removed from the action by sliding to the rear and pressing the release lever on the left of the receiver tube.

### Trigger, safety and magazine

The trigger unit is excellent and fully adjustable from 0.8-1.9kg using an Allen key through a small hole in the alloy trigger blade. Trigger pull was crisp and clean without any drag or creep and set at the factory for a 1.4kg let-off. Safety is a three-position affair behind the bolt handle and operates in a linear manner. A knurled safety lever moves smoothly throughout all three settings, the rear position locking both bolt and trigger, the middle allowing the bolt to be cycled while keeping the trigger locked and forward allowing the rifle to be fired.

The magazine is a detachable box design of hard-wearing polymer holding four cartridges in the .223 Remington calibre. It has a section of the rear blocked off to accept the short cartridge and loaded cartridges sit in a staggered manner. One drawback of the .223 box magazine is the inability to top-load through the action and, when loading, cartridges have to be inserted from the front by pressing the follower and sliding them back into the magazine, a fiddly operation.

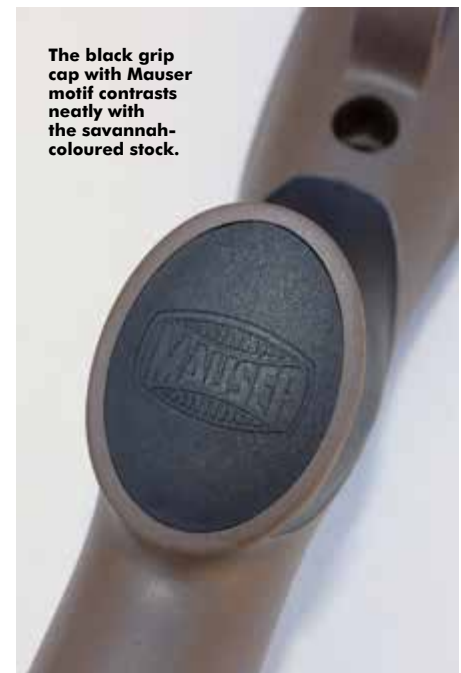
### Stock

This gives the rifle its identity and purpose and is excellent. Made from tough polymer its savannah colour complements the black rubber pistol grip and fore-end inlays, giving a positive slip-free grip and mating with the matte black of the barrelled action. The Feldjagd stock is the only model in the M18 line-up offering an adjustable cheekpiece with the Kalix unit fitted to the hollow buttstock cavity with the riser positioned on the comb. It's easily adjusted to any height using the single screw with the polymer knob on the right of the buttstock.



This feature will be welcomed by shooters and hunters using large-objective optics which require the riflescope to be mounted higher and attain the correct cheek-weld in the process. The buttstock retains the removable recoil pad which exposes the cavity and makes it possible to store any small tools or cleaning pull-throughs for instant access in the field.

Inletting of the stock carries on from the other M18 models with extensive cross-bracing in the barrel channel and rigid sections in the bedding platform giving a free-floated barrel and stable action, anchored to the stock via two counter-sunk hex-head nuts. The recoil lug system consists of a cross-slot milled into the underside of the front receiver ring which mates with a steel lug affixed into a mortise in the floor of the stock, a standard arrangement which serves its purpose well. Two sling swivel studs complete the stock for attachment of a front bipod or similar.





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## Good all-rounder

### At the range

The rifle was topped with the Nikko Stirling Octa scope in 3-24x56 for range testing. OSA also supplied hunting loads in .223 Remington from PPU, Hornady, Buffalo River and GECO along with two other factory loads with heavier bullet weights in the Winchester 64gr Power Point and Sellier & Bellot 69-grain Match.

The M18 Feldjagd shot well, doubtless attributed to its semi-heavy sporter barrel and fluting which helped dissipate heat more quickly, cooling the barrel in the process. All average groups were easily within one Minute of Angle (28mm at 100m) or less, some tight groups shot with GECO, Winchester and Sellier & Bellot ammunition and I'm confident an astute handloader could produce single-figure three-shot

groups by carefully adjusting bullet seating depth and powder charges. The rifle functioned perfectly, chambering and extracting all cases with the Kalix cheekpiece a breeze to adjust for positive cheek-weld.

### Summary

This is one serious hunting, stalking and long-range rifle offered in a wide array of calibres to cater to all hunting requirements. Its savannah-coloured polymer stock, adjustable cheekpiece and nicely profiled fluted barrel, when mated to a suitable optic makes for an excellent outfit. With RRP of \$1990 it should make the shortlist when looking for your first hunting rifle or adding another calibre to your firearms safe. More at [osaaustralia.com.au](http://osaaustralia.com.au) ●

### Mauser M18 Stainless .223 Remington - group accuracy in mm testing at 100m

Ammunition	Best	Worst	Average*
PPU Rifle Line 55gr Soft Point	20	32	25
Buffalo River 55gr Sierra Game King	20	28	24
GECO 56gr Express	16	29	22
Hornady 55gr Spire Point	22	34	25
Winchester 64gr Power-Point	10	19	14
Sellier & Bellot 69gr Match	15	26	20

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

## SPECIFICATIONS

**Rifle:** Mauser M18 Feldjagd

**Action:** Bolt-action, push-feed (three-lug bolt, 60-degree lift)

**Trigger:** Single-stage, adjustable from 0.8-1.9kg

**Calibre:** .223 Remington (tested) also available in .243 Win, 6.5x55 SE, 6.5 CM, 6.5 PRC, .308 Win, .30-06 Spr, 8x57 IS, 9.6x62, 7mm Rem Mag, .300 Win Mag

**Capacity:** Four rounds (.223 Rem) detachable box magazine. Other calibres five rounds (standard), four rounds (magnum)

**Barrel:** Semi-heavy sporter weight, fluted, cold-hammer forged, 560mm for standard calibres, 610mm for magnum, muzzle threaded for accessories

**Sights:** Open, drilled and tapped to accept Rem 700-style bases

**Barrel/Action finish:** Chrome molybdenum steel, matte black finish

**Stock:** Two-component polymer, savannah-coloured with soft-grip black rubber inlays, adjustable Kalix cheekpiece

**Weight:** 3.28kg (standard calibres)

**Length:** 1060mm standard, 1120mm magnum calibres

**RRP:** \$1990

**Distributor:** Outdoor Sporting Agencies

The Mauser M18 Feldjagd makes for a great hunting or long-range rifle.



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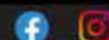
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### Stock colour:

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### Magazine colour:

Silver, Black



# Ammo-marking debate still missing the mark

Rachael Oxborrow

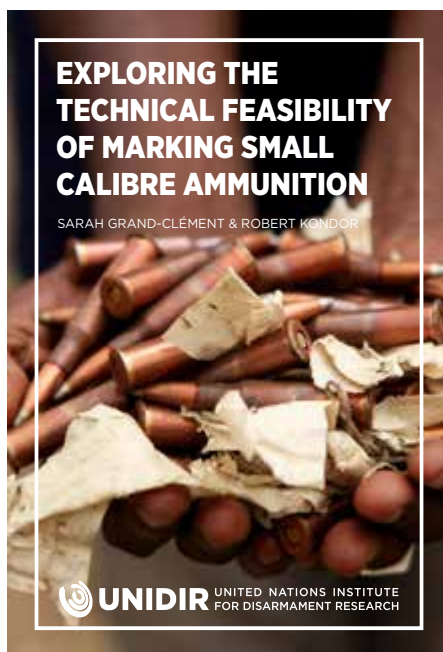
An international push to introduce individual ammunition marking standards in a bid to improve crime-tracing efforts is a distraction measure with little practical application. The concept of introducing such controls has been debated in the international arms community for more than a decade as this latest push stems from United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, an autonomous institute within the UN which is behind a discussion paper to investigate the feasibility of marking small-calibre ammunition.

The discussion paper explores marking ammunition with stamping, laser marking or chemical taggants either individually or by combining several of these methods and aims to provide information to other groups within the UN, inform the international community on the potential that marking could have in reducing firearm crime and process for a consistent marking standard to be developed and recommended internationally.

The Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia is strongly opposed to the concept of marking individual ammunition cases for a number of reasons and is formulating an official response to be provided to the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research. The scope of this discussion paper is narrowly focused on the feasibility of marking methods alone though researchers do point to issues which may arise if the process of implementing such an initiative was to go ahead.

Firearm owners are some of the most regulated members of the community who comply with numerous levels of licensing and checks to own and maintain firearms, to participate in target shooting and recreational hunting. Introducing individual marking measures would only result in exposing this segment of society to further checks and balances and deflect the focus from addressing the criminal element as the root cause of this issue.

Not only would this type of standard negatively impact firearm owners, the industry and Australia's firearms and licensing system, ammunition manufacturers and potentially retailers being required to log heavily detailed purchase information would also be affected. It's likely a majority of firearm owners have



experienced delays with their state or territory's firearms and licensing systems and we can only imagine how the structure would buckle with this added layer of regulation.

The widespread practice of reloading ammunition and reusing empty cartridges is blatantly dismissed in the report as being of negligible size. Introducing legislation of this type has the potential to negatively impact someone reloading by effectively outlawing the practice as it breaks the chain of traceability being sought and also has the potential to tie up law-abiding firearm owners in the criminal tracing process if marked casings are on-sold and subsequently used in a crime.

## WFSA represents at UN meeting

Head of the international association representing more than 100 million sporting shooters has reiterated on the world stage the willingness of law-abiding firearm owners to address illicit firearms trade on a global scale. World Forum on Shooting Activities (WFSA) president Graham Downing delivered this sentiment in a statement during the informal non-government organisation session of the eighth Biennial Meeting of States of the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)

held in New York from June 27 to July 1 this year. The meeting's aim was to consider the national, regional and global implementation of the Programme of Action to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects and its International Tracing Instrument.

WFSA attended on behalf of its hunting, shooting and industry member organisations from around the world with SSAA National being one of the founding members. Countries including Sweden, Germany, Italy, South Africa, the US and more belong to the WFSA whose aim is to further the study, preservation, promotion and protection of sports shooting activities on every continent. The body represents recreational shooting at the UN and has attended every major UN conference affecting hunting and the shooting sports. SSAA National's presence on the WFSA ensures our involvement in relevant international issues and forms part of the Association's commitment to protecting firearm owners' interests.

At the meeting it was decided to establish an Open-ended Technical Expert Group on SALW whose mandate will be to address technical issues such as 3D printing and marking of modular and polymer weapons with the involvement of government and industry experts. The proposal for the establishment of this working group will be discussed at the 4th Review Conference in June 2024 and should then be adopted



**WFSA President Graham Downing presents at the eighth Biennial Meeting of States of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons.**





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## Ammo-marking debate still missing the mark

by resolution at the UN General Assembly, meaning the inaugural meeting should take place in the first quarter of 2025. Mr Downing's full speech is available on the SSAA National website.

### Button battery update

SSAA National is seeking clarification from the Australian Competition & Consumer Commission to find a solution for industry with existing stock caught in the new Consumer Goods Safety Standard 2020 regarding 'button' or 'coin' batteries. The new standard requires battery compartments to be secured to prevent children accessing them due to identified risk where if swallowed, a button battery can lodge in a child's throat and cause a chemical reaction which burns through tissue, causing death or serious injury in quick time. SSAA National will continue to liaise with relevant industry stakeholders once more information is available.

### Canada's ownership freeze

Canadian Shooting Sports Association (CSSA) Executive Director Tony Bernardo said his Association was seeking compensation for its members following moves by the Canadian Government to block importing, buying and selling of handguns.



"The Canadian Shooting Sports Association is disappointed that once again the Liberal Government of Canada has chosen politics over substance and attacked the most lawful segment of Canadian society, legal gun owners," Mr Bernardo said.

"Even worse, the Government has lowered penalties for real firearms-related crimes such as Assault with a Firearm. The Government of Canada has taken more

than \$1 billion of private property value and reduced it to zero, without a penny of compensation offered or a single valid reason. The law-abiding men and women of the CSSA will not rest in reversing this punitive new law and recovering the value of their property." SSAA National will remain in touch with the CSSA on this matter. ●

An advertisement for the Pardini K12 Air Pistol. The pistol is shown in a blue and black finish with a wooden grip, resting on a dark surface. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with green foliage. In the top left corner, the Pardini logo is displayed above the text "K12 AIR PISTOL". In the bottom right corner, the Grycol International logo and website address are shown. A small identification number "D/L: 410650524" is visible in the bottom left corner.

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# Partridge family

As Simon Barr discovered, shooting game birds in the Scottish Borders is a memorable day out

Kirkhope Tower provides a stunning backdrop.

The Scottish Borders look stunning in most if not all weather conditions but on a crisp October morning on the Bowhill Estate they turned out in their autumnal finest. Early frost, clear skies and a gentle westerly breeze greeted the guns who assembled at Kershope Farm just outside Selkirk, home to Stuart Riddell who's been the shooting tenant over Bowhill's 25,000 acres for the past nine years. The shoot is commercially run by Riddell family members with son Robert being head keeper and Stuart's wife Kay in charge of administration.

Bowhill Estate has been owned by the Buccleuch family for more than seven centuries. A vast area of woodland once covered all the hills, valleys and rivers known as the Ettrick Forest and in 1322 Robert the Bruce gave it to the Scott clan, ancestors of today's Buccleuch family, in recognition of their loyalty.

The name Buccleuch originates, as legend has it, from the 10th century when King Kenneth III while hunting in a deep ravine (or cleugh) in the heart of the forest, came upon a cornered buck who charged the unarmed King. A young John Scott managed to seize the buck by the antlers, wrestle it to the ground and spare the monarch's life and from that day the Scotts were referred to as Buccleuch ('the beast from the ravine') and rewarded for their bravery.

As a fifth generation gamekeeper Stuart moved to the prestigious Bowhill in 2012 and Robert has been working with his father since the age of five. "At Bowhill we offer pheasants and partridges over 40-50



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## Partridge family

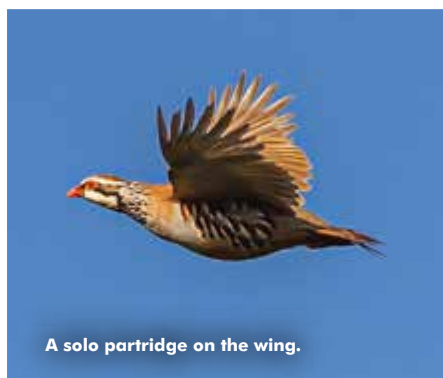
let days with bags typically 150-250 birds,” said Stuart. “At the beginning of September we also lay on 20 or so dog training days for Labradors, usually for six handlers and six guns, which attract interest from all over the UK.”

On the day in question the team and I assembled for the first of two morning drives - both in the Ettrick Valley - against the stunning backdrop of Kirkhope Tower, a 16th century defensive structure in the classic Scottish style sitting at the bottom of a cleft in Kirkhope Hill. Birds came thick and fast, in singles and flushes, to provide excellent sport up and down the line. “Having this kind of topography to play with is just so satisfying - it makes all the hard work that much more worthwhile,” says Stuart.

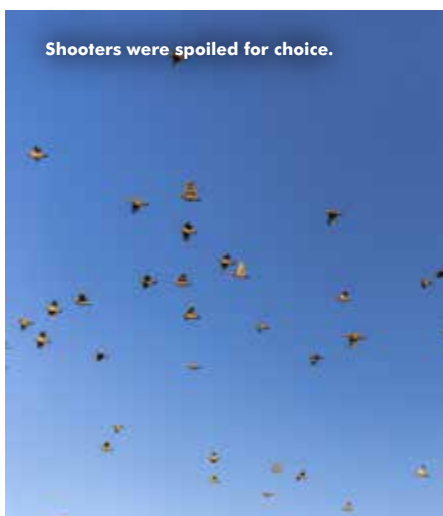
“We like to mix and match drives to provide shooters with maximum variety both in terms of target and setting. We try not to flood the guns with partridges, to the contrary we strive to create a steady flow of birds where each one is memorable and all are shootable.” With 25 drives to choose from it’s clear that for Stuart and his support team of three keepers, four pickers-up and 10 beaters, this objective is



Up and over with another bird for the bag.



A solo partridge on the wing.



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Simon Barr used a Rigby side-by-side shotgun.





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## Partridge family

well within their grasp and on this occasion perfectly executed.

Shooters then broke to regroup ahead of afternoon drives at Watties and Watties Revenge which provided seriously challenging partridges in the forbidding Yarrow Valley terrain, in contrast to the morning's more gentle Ettrick Valley bluffs and gullies. Here the birds are flushed from the edge of the heather and bracken high on the hill and set their wings to glide and curl over the guns positioned 50m below as the flankers are called into frenetic action.

"The final count was 174 partridges," says Stuart "and you could see the pheasants were pretty much ready to go as well today." He buys and breeds 80,000 day-old pheasants each year with half of them sold on locally and further afield in Scotland. In terms of shot game, most stay in the Borders with some going to a dealer further north. "But the guns are certainly taking more these days," says Stuart "and hotels in particular like partridges."

As with every well-established and highly regarded shoot, much hard work goes unnoticed behind the scenes to ensure biodiversity gains are maximised and conservation is front and centre of the shoot's ethos.

"The ground here is mainly hill so we have a lot of sheep," says Stuart. "In the middle of it all is an 8000-acre grouse moor surrounded by low ground so it's a haven for wildlife and I'm especially pleased to have several pairs of nesting barn owls around my house."

The moor, which attracts no grouse from elsewhere, has remained un-shot for decades and in further validation of their hard work, the Riddells can boast an exemplary audit from the British Game Alliance of which they're keen supporters. Says Stuart: "The BGA spent a full day with us and asked to see one of our larger release pens so we showed them one with a 3000 capacity. They were particularly impressed with the level of grass and leaves, noting in their report there was little obvious sign of pheasant release."

Stuart enjoys plenty of repeat business at Bowhill with shoot bookings extremely healthy, indeed one syndicate team has been back for 17 straight years. "It seems they just want to keep coming back," he says "though they probably cost me as they fire an awful lot of cartridges but over the years I've learned to stop counting."

• Readers looking for more information should visit [hawthornsporting.co.uk](http://hawthornsporting.co.uk) ●



**The rugged Scottish landscape can be challenging.**



**Plenty to choose from as the beaters do their job.**

**Red flag calls an end to the day's shooting.**



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  - Match trigger
  - Ambidextrous bolt
  - AR style grip



## FX MAVERICK SNIPER

- SPECIFICATIONS**
- 700mm barrel
  - Aluminium chassis
  - Adjustable regulators
  - Carbon fibre tank
  - 580cc air tank
  - Match trigger
  - Large magazine
  - AR style grip



## FX DREAMLINE LITE

- SPECIFICATIONS**
- Light design
  - 3 stage power adjuster
  - Adjustable regulator
  - Aluminium tank
  - 11mm dovetail rail
  - Match trigger
  - Large magazine
  - AR style grip



## FX CROWN MK2 NORDIC WOLF

### SPECIFICATIONS

- GRS stock
- 3 stage power adjuster
- Adjustable regulator
- Carbon fibre tank
- 480cc air tank
- Match trigger
- Large magazine



# Ground-breaking quail study validates SA hunting season

Rachael Oxborrow

Quail numbers in South Australia are super-healthy.

**A** SSAA National-led wildlife survey involving more than 17,000 documented quail sightings from across South Australia has effectively shown quail hunting poses no risk to the future of the species. The grassroots effort to prove widespread and abundant quail population - the first time the game bird has been monitored in this way since the 1980s - projected a quail population of between 6.2 and 17.7 million birds with the study's release prompting authorities to declare a quail hunting season in South Australia for the first time since 2019.

SSAA National Wildlife Programs Leader Matthew Godson said a lack of scientific interest in quail, a species which doesn't fit the endangered or pest narrative that typically attracts attention and funding, had left it virtually ignored for decades. "The SA Minister for Environment blamed lack of data on quail populations for why he didn't declare 2020-21 quail seasons and from here it became clear we'd need to produce this information if we were ever to have a quail season again," Godson said.

"Within the hunting community there's an appetite to collect data to show hunting is no risk to statewide stubble quail populations and that hunters can continue to sustainably harvest quail within a regulated environment. Any ban or closure of the regulated hunting season has the potential to drive the activity underground where there would be no conservation benefits."

## Quail presence and abundance

Through a partnership between a federation of likeminded hunters and conservationist groups known as the Conservation and Hunting Alliance of South Australia (CHASA) and SSAA National, a network of volunteers was created to inform the study. Using two methods to count quail the network was able to collect data on their numbers across a portion of SA's 70 million hectares of available quail habitat. Surveys were conducted on 124 properties on the Eyre Peninsula, Mid North, Kangaroo Island, Yorke Peninsula, Murraylands, Coorong and Mallee with 16,024 birds counted in an area of 11,828 hectares which



included canola, lentil, barley, wheat and hay crops. Data was collected by farmers harvesting crops and on drive counts with walking observers and trained dogs during November and December 2021.

"During data collection and through ongoing conversations with landholders we were able to gather significant population counts and also include observations of habitat, movements and sightings of quail breeding," Godson said, adding this type of data hadn't been widely researched previously, whereas stubble quail diet had historically been covered extensively. "We know from quail diet research the birds mainly eat seeds and green leaf material that can include pasture plants and weeds," he said.

"Meanwhile insect and larvae are more important for hatchlings and are more of a secondary source of food for adults. This type of information complements our data surveys to help us deduce that quail move across the landscape to source food and a substantial population is living across South Australia's 70 million hectares of potential habitat."

Observations of the data indicate areas with more rainfall and in higher cropping production zones correlate with higher density quail populations. For example, Godson estimates around 600,000 quail to have been present across the Yorke Peninsula region on cropping land in densities ranging from 0.03 to 3.33 birds per hectare, while observations in the upper Murraylands region where the South Australian, Victorian and New South Wales borders meet showed lower population densities of around 0.02 birds per hectare. To compare rainfall for these two regions there's a mean annual figure of 251.7 millimetres at Renmark and 370.2mm at Moonta. Crop estimates for the Upper Murraylands for 2021 were 0.8 tonnes per hectare compared to 3.3 t/ha on Yorke Peninsula.

## Population and hunting risk

Godson said traditionally hunters preferred higher rainfall areas of the state for hunting as this often correlates with more chance of bird sightings and take. "With a historical





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## Ground-breaking quail study validates SA hunting season

average statewide harvest of 5091 individual quail per year and an estimated 2087 bagged from the Yorke Peninsula region alone, it's clear quail hunting has an insignificant impact on populations found and poses no risk to their existence," he said. "Internationally accepted harvest rates sit at 10-20 per cent of a quail population and we come in at around 0.04 per cent. For the Yorke Peninsula region, the area traditionally most visited by quail hunters, data indicates a harvest rate of around 0.23 per cent."

### Hunting sustainably and research

Godson said the sheer level of volunteer involvement in this survey illustrated a community willing to protect quail populations while allowing for sustainable hunting seasons. He said the work across the surveyed areas of SA's landscape showed significant numbers of quail in varying densities. "For those who doubt the sustainability of hunting, this is another example that Australia's oldest land use is sustainable and through regulation and seasons there are opportunities to learn more about this species," he said.

"The numbers speak for themselves. There are literally millions of stubble quail in farmers' paddocks and those wanting to

enjoy the hunt with family and friends to bring home a prized game meat for a unique meal can do so without having a negative impact on quail populations."

SSAA National began quail research in 2011, initially analysing head and wing samples sent in by hunters to inform the age and sex of harvested birds. This work was conducted over several years to provide insight into the structure of quail

populations, breeding timing, preferred habitats and movements. The 2021 study has the potential to continue providing opportunities to map quail population changes over time while also supporting the case for an ongoing hunting season. Godson said this was a valuable research path for both the hunting community and wildlife managers across the country. ●

• Page 54: Quail of a time



Hunting stubble quail poses absolutely no threat.

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# Balancing act

Webley & Scott's 900XS delighted Paul Miller

**W**e reviewed the Webley & Scott 912K over-and-under shotgun in 2011 and were very impressed by its quality of manufacture and even more so by the price it could be bought for at the time and the gun we're looking at here is basically an upgrade of that one with a more modern look and an interesting weight system incorporated into the stock. The name Webley & Scott is as famous as ever and it's fair to say they're well and truly back in the game.

## Stock and fore-end

This 12-gauge features a well-matched piece of Turkish walnut in the stock and fore-end that's sufficiently dense to accommodate the fine and modern laser-cut panelled chequering, the stock of a sporter profile with drop of 1½" at comb and 2¼" at heel (37mm and 57mm), an average set of dimensions for Sporting Clays. Combine

this with an adjustable comb and you can really fine-tune gun-fit for a right-handed shooter.

The recoil pad is slim yet well-shaped and provides some recoil reduction, the pistol grip enhanced by a highly comfortable right-handed palmwell which felt unobtrusive even to a leftie like me. The slim fore-end has the thickness of a sporter fore-end but was profiled like a beaver-tail which felt nice in the hand and a worthwhile compromise of the two styles.

The 900XS incorporates a balancing system called 'Equipoise' - four cylindrical weights ranging in 25gm increments from 75g-175g which attach to the stock bolt inside the stock to allow fine-tuning of the gun's balance forward or aft. As it came from the box it was rather front-heavy which I didn't mind though adding the lightest weight made it feel just right for me. Feel is a strange and personal thing in shotgunning and gun balance is an

important contributor to achieving this.

Some people prefer a gun balanced neutrally over the hinge-pin while others prefer it barrel heavy or barrel light - front-heavier tends to smooth out the swing while stock-heavy (barrel light) tends to promote a quicker swing. It's a matter of personal preference and the Equipoise system allows you to fine-tune balance, quite amazing for the price of this gun compared to other competition shotguns with this type of feature which are vastly more expensive.

## Barrels

The 30" barrels are extremely well made and blued with a hi-viz front sight, chambered for 3" (76mm) shotshells which means heavier shot-loads in longer shells for field shooting can be accommodated. I expect most shooters will stick with 2¼" (70mm) shells for competition or practice



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## Balancing act



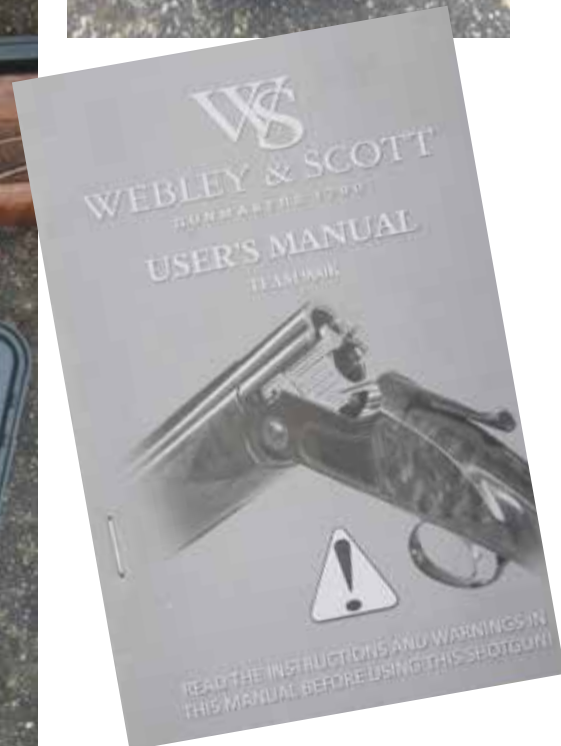
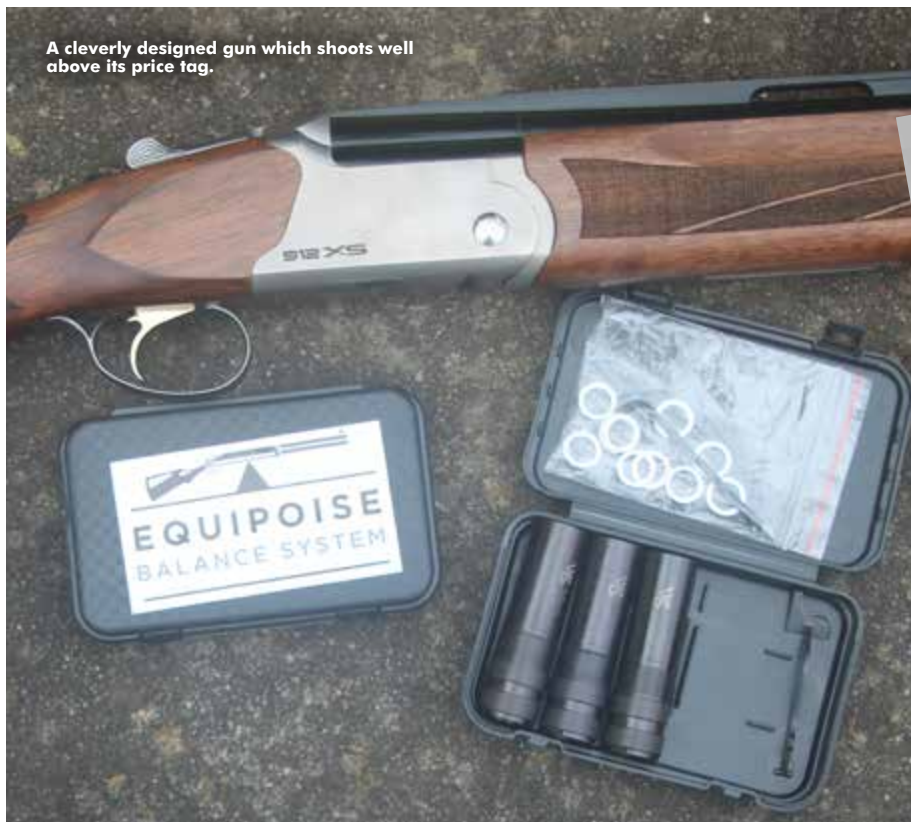
but this gun would certainly acquit itself well in the field. The top rib is ventilated and filed along the top to reduce glare and there are two solid side ribs between the barrels.

Five extended chokes are supplied - Skeet through Full as is generally the case nowadays - being matte black which looks rather tasteful and will be appreciated by shooters who don't normally like the visual aspect of extended chokes. All those I tried destroyed targets at appropriate ranges and were most satisfactory. These chokes are described as being steel-shot proof but I wouldn't use steel in Three-quarter or Full simply out of caution as it's just not worth the risk - you get approximately Full choke

patterns out of a Half choke with steel shot so leave it at that.

### Action

The box-lock action has a rather sporty angle to the rear. Most box-locks we see have a vertical rear to the box but the 900XS is longer at the base than the top which creates a rather smart angled appearance and has no bearing on the structural integrity of the actual box-lock and trigger mechanism within the action. The action itself is of a silver nitride finish with minimal but tasteful laser engraving of name and model number on the side and underside. Trigger pulls are crisp and let off at around 4lb each, it's not adjustable for



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## Balancing act



length of finger and lock-up of the action is of the common under-bolt configuration we see on so many shotguns and is entirely safe and reliable.

### Shooting impressions

I gave this shotgun a thorough workout on Skeet and Trap targets where it handled extremely well and was obviously enhanced by the balancing system in the stock. I had it balanced just ahead of the hinge pin which felt great, precise yet quite quick to swing with targets broken consistently at all ranges when I played my part. Several of my right-handed mates tried it and agreed the stock dimensions were perfect for Sporting or Skeet and with the adjustable comb you could set this gun up to do anything you want in the clay target arena.

However, as a value-for-money clay gun it's more than just entry level due to that adjustable comb and clever balancing system. I feel it would make a satisfying



Sporter and assist owners to record more than creditable scores in both Sporting or Skeet and while it could be used for the odd

round of Trap and do a good job, it's not a serious competitor's Trap gun. Either way, highly recommended. ●



### Specifications:

<b>Manufacturer:</b>	Webley & Scott
<b>Model:</b>	900XS
<b>Manufactured in:</b>	Turkey
<b>Gauge:</b>	12-gauge, 3" chambers
<b>Action:</b>	Box-lock inertia cocking
<b>Trigger:</b>	Single selective, tang safety
<b>Barrel length:</b>	30", 3" chambers
<b>Chokes:</b>	Five extended, Skeet, 1/4, 1/2, 3/4, Full
<b>Stock and fore-end:</b>	Walnut (Grade 1) with satin finish, medium pistol grip with palmwell and slim beavertail fore-end
<b>Stock dimensions:</b>	37mm at comb, 57mm at heel, cast 3.5mm for right-handers, 14.75" length of pull
<b>Weight:</b>	8lb or 3.7kg
<b>Accessories:</b>	Choke wrench, instruction manual, 'Equipoise' stock-balance system
<b>RRP:</b>	About \$1695 but shop around
<b>Warranty:</b>	Five years
<b>Distributor:</b>	Outdoor Sporting Agencies, Vic




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Audio Recording	Yes
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PIP	Yes
Reticle	Yes
Freeze Zeroing	Yes
Wi-Fi Hotspot	Yes, HIKMICRO Sight APP
Battery Operating Time	13 hours continuous running (@25°C, Wi-Fi off)

# Light fantastic

Octa illuminated riflescope's a winner, says Con Kapralos



**W**ith an expansive field of view and ample eye-relief this is a great optic that'll cover all hunting eventualities, be it in thick cover or shooting out to 300m or more. The simple illuminated 4A-Dot reticle is uncomplicated but one of the best out there for hunting applications. Recent riflescope releases from Nikko Stirling have certainly raised the bar for shooters and hunters seeking quality optics without breaking the bank with new models including the Hornet ED, Meteor, Diamond, Boar Eater and Octa having been added to an already impressive array of riflescopes.

The Octa bracket comprising three models based around an eight-times magnification range have been well received since their introduction in 2018. Early models in

the 1-8x24 and 2-16x50 together with their flagship - the recently released 3-24x56 - offer feature-packed optics and it's just a matter of matching the correct Octa scope to your hunting rifle. The Octa is a hunting riflescope with capped dials and 4A-Dot glass etched reticle with illumination. Outdoor Sporting Agencies sent *Australian Shooter* the Octa in 3-24x56 illuminated for evaluation along with two models of the Mauser M18 rifle (see Page 24).

## At a glance

The scope arrived in the customary red and black Nikko Stirling carton which also contained protective lens covers, CR2032 battery, cleaning cloth and instruction booklet. The Octa, like all Nikko Stirling optics, is covered by a lifetime warranty

(original owner with proof of purchase) with the exception of electronic components which carry a five-year warranty. The Octa 3-24x56 is 388mm long and weighs 784 grams.

## External features

This is a handsome unit made from aircraft grade aluminium with the one-piece body sporting a 30mm main tube finished in hard-anodised satin black. The objective bell housing is 63.5mm in diameter and the ocular housing 90mm x 46mm and there's ample space on the main tube fore and aft of the turret housing for positioning the scope when setting up in the required ring/bases. The ocular housing is neatly profiled, something several manufacturers would do well to look at, the housing containing the adjustable eyepiece (diopter) focusing ring at its terminal end and power magnification dial forward.

The diopter focusing ring lets you attain a crystal-clear image and is handy for spectacle wearers like myself. The aluminium power magnification dial has two rows of 10 stippled squares around its circumference which give a positive grip when moving the dial from 3x to 24x with smooth movement throughout.

The turret housing located 'mid-ships' is spot-on for a modern hunting optic, the elevation and windage dials excellent in design and even the smallest details have been addressed. Both dials are capped with aluminium covers and neatly finished with a serrated edge around their circumference, giving a good grip when rotating the dial. Both the elevation and windage dials have ¼ MOA increments which are audible and easy to feel, making precise adjustments



A single CR2032 battery is easy to change.



The Octa 3-24x56 is the model's flagship and within reach of hunters on a budget.



The illumination and parallax dial work well in close proximity.



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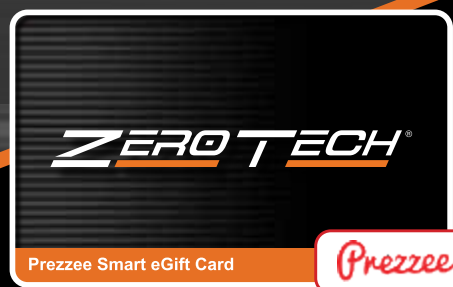
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The elevation dial is marked with a 15 MOA range (in  $\frac{1}{4}$  MOA increments) around its collar while the windage dial is from -7 to +7 (in  $\frac{1}{4}$  MOA increments) around its collar, both resettable to zero by loosening a small screw on the top then setting to the '0' mark before retightening. There's no 'zero-stop' but this is a hunting scope with a simple reticle and not a long-range dialling optic. Total adjustment for both elevation and windage is 80 MOA.

The parallax and illumination dials are adjacent to elevation/windage and well laid out. The parallax dial is closest to the turret body and neatly marked from 10 yards to infinity at 25, 30, 40, 50, 60, 75, 100, 150 and 300 yards so no need to guess, unlike some parallax dials which only have minimum and maximum and nothing in-between. The illumination dial sits on the outer edge and has 11 increments for brightness with an 'Off' setting between minimum and maximum. The CR2032 battery is in the dial housing and easy to access.

#### Internal features

I'm a fan of simple reticles and while hash-marks and hold-over points may appeal to some, as a hunter simple is best and the 4A-Dot reticle with illumination is right up there. The illumination dot is only seen when turned on and obvious at the intersection point of the fine cross-hairs in the centre of the image. It not only works well during daylight, bringing the dot quickly to the target, but excels in poor light conditions. The reticle is in the second focal plane, perfect for a hunting optic where the reticle image stays the same size despite

changes in magnification.

All internal glass elements are precisely ground, polished and fully multicoated as you'd expect and nitrogen purged with quality seals to keep moisture, dust and dirt at bay. Nikko Stirling don't make a fuss over elaborate lens coatings and light transmission percentages - they deliver scopes to carry out a particular function and always back the consumer if problems are encountered.

#### At the range

The optic was used on a Mauser M18 Feldjagd in .223 Remington at 100m during an accuracy test for that rifle and with conditions during several range sessions providing sun and light winds, performance of the Octa 3-24x56 was superb. Put your eye behind the scope and a clear image is seen with no 'black shadows' evident, more pleasing in that this was the norm throughout the 3-24 magnification.

Accuracy testing the rifle was done with magnification set at 24x which made shooting groups so much easier. When setting up the scope at 25m (after bore-sighting) having the 3x setting made simple work of adjusting point-of-aim before shooting at 100m. The eight-times magnification is extremely handy in a hunting scenario - set the optic on 3x if hunting in scrub or timber and for longer shots out in the open wind it up to 8-12x. With a stable rest, shooting from a ground blind or prone, wind it up towards 20x and it delivers the goods. A good measure of any riflescope is testing its tracking and 'shooting the square' in optic-speak. Following my usual tracking protocol with the Octa set at 12x, the 'square' was duly shot, with two shots

fired at each corner and the final two at the starting point.

This scope performed as expected with adjustments in elevation and windage pretty-well spot-on. Being a hunting optic there was no need to test the extremes of adjustment in windage and elevation as that's best left to scopes designed for long-range shooting and spinning dials. Images through the Octa 3-24x56 were crisp and clear out to all shooting distances and beyond, with excellent field of view at 100m of 13.5-1.7 and around 90mm of eye relief. It's not meant to challenge riflescopes in the \$1000-plus bracket but with a retail price of \$695 is a solid buy. The Octa 3-24x56 is available from Outdoor Sporting Agencies dealers Australia-wide. More at [osaaustralia.com.au](http://osaaustralia.com.au) ●

## Specifications

**Manufacturer:** Nikko Stirling (made in China)

**Model:** Octa

**Magnification range:** 3x-24x

**Objective lens:** 56mm

**Main tube diameter:** 30mm

**Ocular:** Adjustable diopter/focus eyepiece

**Reticle:** 4A-Dot, glass-etched, second focal plane

**Illumination:** Yes - 11-position

**Elevation/Windage:** Capped dials,  $\frac{1}{4}$  MOA click increments, resettable to zero. 80 MOA total adjustment range

**Parallax:** 10 yards to infinity

**Length:** 388mm

**Weight:** 784g

**RRP:** \$695

**Distributor:** Outdoor Sporting Agencies.





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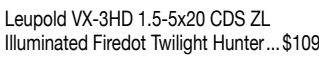


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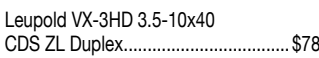
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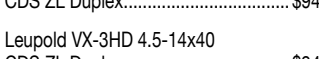
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# Quail of a time

Speedy game birds worthy of your attention, says Leon Wright

It was a beautiful crisp morning and I'd have been hard pressed to think of a better place to be than standing in this quail paddock watching my Curly-Coated Retriever, Missy, searching diligently for quail. She could tell they were nearby and her nose never left the ground as she rummaged relentlessly. Going by her

body actions, rudder wagging continuously, nose casting about following the tiny scent globules I knew she was close, so I quietly shut the action on my Beretta Classic over-and-under.

There would be no classy 'freeze' when the quail were found as Curlies don't point in the true sense of the world, rather

they're a flushing dog and will put the quail to flight when finally discovered and that's exactly what happened. From virtually under Missy's nose the birds went up with a rattle of wings, startling both the dog and me.

Tracking their flight over the rib of the Beretta, I let it level out a bit then touched



Two quail hunters enjoying a day in the field - Blake with Missy.





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## Quail of a time

the trigger. The 28-grain load of No.9 shot of Bronze Wing Terminator travelling at 1200fps quickly caught up with the quail and with a puff of feathers it fell headfirst into the stubble. Going down headfirst is a good indicator of a dead quail and they're usually easy to find with or without a dog. It's when they go down feet first, usually an indication of a wounded bird, that you'll struggle to find them without the assistance of a dog, as their camouflage is that good.

The dog and I put in another hour but the morning was starting to heat up so it was time to call it a day and we'd done reasonably well. The timing of quail opening doesn't usually make for good hunting as by early April, those paddocks which haven't been burnt off in readiness for the next crop are rare and most have probably been sprayed to keep the weeds under control, if they're not being used for stock grazing.

Those of us old enough to remember the split season will probably agree it worked better as at least we had the chance to take a feed or two. For the benefit of those hunters who don't know what I'm

talking about we used to have two short seasons, the first usually starting around late February and lasting a few weeks, then a rest period of some weeks before the remainder of the season. It seemed to work well in our area.

### Species

While Australia is blessed with at least half-a-dozen species of quail, in the area of Victoria where I live we have three main varieties in the button, the brown and the stubble quail and of these the latter is the only one to have a gazetted season which usually starts in early April. The difference between the species is quite noticeable, with the brown quail a shade darker and a bit bigger than the stubble with the button being a lot smaller.

The name stubble is a bit of a misnomer for the breed as it can be found in all sorts of terrain from wide-open grasslands, paddocks full of thistles such as Bathurst burr, irrigated areas and, of course, stubble paddocks. I'm quite sure stubble quail were around long before cropping started in

Australia. When shooting quail was legal in New South Wales we always took our quail hunting equipment with us on pig hunts during quail season as at times the wide-open grasslands seemed alive with them.

### Guns and ammo

While the 12-gauge shotgun would be the first choice for most quail hunters the 20-gauge is another excellent option, although rarely seen. I've used the 20-gauge on numerous hunts and often felt blessed carrying it when a hunt required a lot of walking with the weight difference quite noticeable. Even a 410 calibre in the right hands, when birds are rising close to the hunter, will put in an acceptable effort and I dare say there are those who go after quail with a 16 or 28-gauge and why not.

In most situations the more open the chokes the better, especially if hunting over a Pointer locked into a rock-solid point where an open choke, such as improved cylinder, will give you a better chance of scoring a fast-rising bird. Naturally every hunt is different and on a windy day where



While not as flashy as the Pointers, Missy is methodical in her search for quail.



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## Quail of a time

quail are flighty and a lot further away, you'll wish you had the modified and improved modified choke fitted instead. It's times like those when the inter-changeable choke is a blessing.

But when conditions are right a dense load of No.9 shot is all that's required. Winchester 1oz (28gr) of No.9 pushed along at a respectable 1300fps is perfect, but when I can't source them a trap load is my go-to. There may be times, mostly towards season's end, when you need to step up to 32gr (1½oz) or even 36gr loads of No. 7, 8 or 9 shot to drop birds flying further out.

### Dogs

When pondering quail hunting you could be excused for thinking it's the exclusive domain of the Pointer such as the German shorthair, short or wire-haired and the English Pointer but nothing could be further from the truth. Admittedly hunting over a smooth-working Pointer is one of the great joys but there are numerous dogs that'll help put quail in your bag. One successful hunter I know uses his faithful Labrador duck dog backed up by a couple of Jack Russell Terriers while others prefer Weimaraners or Brittany Spaniels and I'm happy with my Curlies. I've no doubt my wife's Cavalier King Charles Spaniel would hunt quail once he gets the hang of it so in short, any dog is better than no dog.

### Tricks

There will be those among us who can't justify owning a dog due to circumstances but who still enjoy the odd quail hunt. It's harder without a dog but not impossible, especially when hunting with a mate, as two



Leon's Beretta Classic in 12-gauge is ideal for duck and quail.

people walking 20m apart through stubble with a length of rope being dragged along the ground will often put-up stubble quail which could otherwise be missed. It's not ideal but can help take a few birds home.

When hunting on your own without a dog, don't fall into the trap of taking more than one bird at a time as you're bound to lose at least one. Upon downing a quail don't take your eyes off where it landed, walk to the spot, drop your hat and start looking. Quail are notoriously hard to find once they're down as their camouflage is that good and your hat on the ground is an ideal a marker. And avoid shooting directly over your dog as it could send the animal deaf - if possible approach the dog from its side to take a shot.



Blake with a haul of quail that fell to his old Churchill 12-gauge over-and-under.



A selection of cartridges Leon uses throughout the season.

### Dangers

Even in April the weather is still quite warm so make sure you have water on hand for the dog to prevent heat stress. Unfortunately there's not much we can do about snakes except to be vigilant so keep an eye on your dog and if it's acting strangely in any way, check it out. On one quail hunt my Curly started behaving oddly and was bleeding from the mouth, so the hunt was abandoned and I rushed her to the vet after my initial inspection found nothing.

The vet thoroughly examined her and was on the verge of saying she could find nothing wrong when she noticed blood coming from Missy's tongue so, with a pair of tweezers, she removed a 10cm piece of straw which had penetrated her tongue and was stuck down her throat. But such occurrences are rare and I'm the first to admit that a day out after quail is never a day wasted, no matter how many you take. ●





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The X-Bolt Composite Stalker is an excellent rifle choice for hunting in conditions where you may not wish to take the traditional walnut stocked rifle.

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Sam shows the 20-cent hole in the army tarpaulin tent where a brown snake entered.

# Snakes

# alive!

Seasoned hunter Sam Garro recalls some close encounters of the fanged variety

**D**own the years I've endured various scrapes with wildlife critters and situations of one type or another while hunting, from a wounded boar set on charging, a snarling dominant goanna, biting hares and stinging insects to name a few, but none more dangerous than snakes. Thankfully each time I emerged unscathed, albeit a bit shaken and wiser for the ordeal. The onset of warmer weather in spring through summer is when snakes are most active - and not just during the day but also at night as I've found in more recent times from personal experience and as recounted by property owners.

## First encounter

My initial run-in was with a sizeable brown snake warming itself on top of a channel levy during an afternoon's rabbiting. Luckily I spotted it a few metres ahead in a small patch of bare ground among some thistles and was able to avoid it, though it

sent a chill down my spine as I pondered the possible outcome.

From that day forth my sense of awareness and detection heightened as I became more observant of the ground travelled in front, particularly when walking through tall grass, rocky areas and places near water where snakes are likely to frequent and remain hidden or camouflaged. From time to time straight black branches and brownish lumpy shapes resembling a curled-up snake have often caused me to instinctively stop and take a closer look before continuing.

## Too close for comfort

There are also occasions when all the care and precaution can count for nothing if a really close call occurs and on this particular occasion I firmly believe some sort of divine intervention was on my side. I'd been hunting alone in fairly open, lightly grassed ground beside the Lachlan River in New South Wales when the distant sound of

Sam nabs a rabbit as his TurtleSkin gaiters keep him safe from lurking danger.





the landowner's tractor caught my attention and for some reason I turned momentarily to listen. As I spun back to take my next step a fully grown brown snake lay directly in front, coiled with its head raised ready to strike. Petrified and fearing the worst I froze for a few seconds before taking a couple of measured rearward steps and distancing myself. I took a moment to gather myself before giving it a wide berth and continuing.

Another time while photographing a mob of kangaroos I noticed one roo cooling itself in a shaded waterhole - or so I thought. As I approached the animal to snap a rare close-up I soon realised it wasn't going anywhere as it was well and truly bogged and ethically I couldn't continue without at least trying to save it. As I stepped into the water both legs sunk to my thighs and on grabbing the roo's tail it uttered a few guttural growls which surprised me but I held on as I was committed to the task. It soon settled, perhaps realising I meant no harm and it took all I could muster to dislodge and heave it and myself from the quagmire.

Totally exhausted and in the process of moving it to drier ground, I somehow dragged it over a red-bellied black snake which happened to slither across our path at same time. It happened so quickly I'd no idea where it came from but luckily the snake was more interested in exiting the scene. Pleasingly the kangaroo recovered after resting a while and bounded off into the bush.



**The kangaroo rescued by Sam and (inset) the red-bellied black snake over which the roo was dragged.**

#### **Snake in the tent**

On this occasion partial flooding on the property forced us to set up our tent on a narrow levy or raised dirt track close to the river. The following day on returning from the morning's hunt, my cousin undid the vertical tent zip and peered inside for a folding knife on his stretcher. By chance he didn't go in and went to look elsewhere.

Seconds later as I was removing gear from the vehicle close to the tent, I detected movement out the side of my eye and turned to see a large brown snake slithering out the tent and down the banking. Except for a 20c-sized hole where the



**Sam, left, and hunting companion wear TurtleSkin SnakeArmor gaiters in Queensland's Brisbane Valley, classic brown snake country.**



**Two brown snakes outside a cluster of rabbit burrows.**



## Snakes alive!

horizontal and vertical zips met, the army tarpaulin of heavy-duty canvas was fully enclosed, including the floor. To this day I ponder our potential demise had we discovered the snake in our tent at night, panicked and frantically tried to get out. Thereafter that gap was stuffed with a rag.

### Camp precautions

As far as possible your camp should be in a clearing or cleared ground away from water, nearby heaped brush or timber, rocky outcrops and any type of growth or habitat where snakes and other critters such as spiders and scorpions can shelter. If items like boots, sleeping bags and blankets are exposed around camp they should always be checked before use.

### Habitat and behaviour

Mainly in outback NSW I've ran into red-bellied black, brown and tiger snakes. The first is considered relatively passive and less aggressive, found mostly near water like swamps, creeks, irrigation channels and dams inhabited with frogs, rodents, birds and fish. Brown and tiger snakes can be

encountered almost anywhere and particularly around woolsheds, hay bale stores and other farm buildings where mice, rabbits, birds and other snakes, including their own kind, reside and form a food source.

On cooler days and mornings they'll seek places like atop a levy bank, wood pile or sunny spot where they can warm themselves and contrary to any beliefs they don't venture out at night, they actually do. My personal night encounters have been rare and oddly were all juveniles about 60cm long though other people have come across fully grown snakes under different circumstances.



A red-bellied black snake heads for water.



This slippery customer was confronted near a dam.



Amid a rabbit plague, this brown snake feeds well and suns itself.



A large diamond python, not poisonous but can inflict a nasty bite.

### Unprecedented time

One September on a sheep station, a rabbit plague had dominated the property. In a particular section of the ground riddled with clusters of burrows we had to watch our step as brown snakes were regularly found warming themselves at the entrance to a burrow and were stumbled upon by us in the nearby heaped leftover cuttings from previous logging operations. Foxes, large goannas and birds of prey also relished that abundant food source.

### Do's and don'ts

If a snake is seen then try to stay calm and slowly move away or take a wide berth. Don't disturb, antagonise or try to kill it as they can move surprisingly fast and inflict a bite much quicker than you can take evasive action. Most of the time it's trying to go from A to B and you're in its way. Never try to pick up a snake as even expert snake handlers occasionally are bitten but they're prepared with antivenin and are close to emergency services. Usually a snake will move away and is less inclined to confront a large intruder.

A mate once unthinkingly stuck his hand down a burrow hoping to grab a rabbit but felt the cold body of a snake, his hand withdrawn as if he'd touched a hot iron. He was lucky and this is definitely a 'do not' so if necessary, use a stiff wire suitably hooked at one end to retrieve the rabbit.



### Optimising protection

High 8" ankle boots along with snake-proof leg gaiters are an essential piece of gear I've long relied on. There are various types and brands on the market made of different materials including leather though my personal preference is the lightweight and flexible TurtleSkin SnakeArmor gaiters made of tight, high-strength weave material. They also make snake chaps which reach the hips and full-length pants if even greater protection is sought. Synthetic gaiters designed to keep grass and foreign matter out, long trousers and sleeved shirts, gumboots and waders all help lessen the chance of a snake's fangs penetrating through to the skin but for proper full protection snake-proof gaiters should be worn, particularly in places where snakes are known to be prevalent.

### Bite kit and communication

From my early years of hunting I always carry a basic self-assembled snake kit but in those days the approach was different with a rubber tourniquet applied and potassium permanganate crystals rubbed into the wound. Nowadays a crepe bandage wrapped firmly above the bite area is the recommended and preferred method with the limb immobilised as best you can. A modern-day kit can be had from various suppliers like St John Ambulance, Brenniston through Officeworks, Tuffa and others as found on the internet.

A five-watt handheld radio, satellite phone or mobile phone where there's reception with emergency services numbers logged in are also valuable aids and in the event of a bite, snake identification by noting its colour and features or taking a photo is also important for administration of the correct antivenin. ●



Sam does his TurtleSkin SnakeArmor gaiters and prepares other safety gear.

## New Horus range now available



Advanced reticle and optics manufacturer Horus Vision has recently launched its latest line of HoVR precision shooting products in Australia through the Lightforce Group of companies based in Adelaide. The range includes their new 5-20x50 FFP riflescope, 1.0 BT 2000 laser rangefinder and the HoVR 1.0 weather meter which work in conjunction with the free Horus ballistics app.

The riflescope is now available with three different Horus advanced reticles, all of which use the patented Horus Grid and a range of other features which make them ideal for precision shooting. Said Lightforce national sales manager Joshua Waite: "We're excited to make these products available in Australia as Horus reticles have proved very popular here." More information and a list of dealers Australia-wide are available at [horusvision.com.au](http://horusvision.com.au)

ADVERTORIAL

# Good as new

Refurbishing a Winchester .30-06 was a winner for John McDougall



Many years ago I acquired a Winchester .30-06 in exchange for some photographic work I'd done for a Winchester calendar. As an aspiring deer hunter at the time living in Ballarat, I opted for a Model 70 XTR Sporter in lieu of payment to pursue my passion for sambar hunting. In time I married and moved to Phillip Island, held on to my shotguns but all my rifles were sold and replaced by fishing rods. Having a gun club on Phillip Island was a real bonus but I opted to chase fish instead of sambar until another 27 years down the track.

The young student who'd bought the rifle offered me it back for the same price I sold it, which was cheap at the time as I was trying to encourage him into the sport, so that wonderful old Winchester came back into my possession but certainly worse for 27 years of wear. So what could I do? The rifle shot less-than-desirable groups so I took it to my old friend John Miall of Miall's Gunshop in Frankston to see what could be done to restore it to its former glory. To further complicate things my gun-safe had flooded after torrential rain which went unnoticed for some time and the blueing had been destroyed.

John was extremely helpful, we had a detailed conversation on the options available and I decided to go with his expertise and have the rifle fully refurbished. The poor grouping was to be overcome by removing a tiny part of the barrel where a bulge affecting accuracy had developed and this was replaced with a KDF muzzle-brake as we felt that would be enough to tighten the groups. There was an old Tasco World Class 3-9 variable scope fitted which was new when I took ownership of the rifle but was now replaced by a Leupold Vari-X-III 2.5x8 fitted to the original Hillver bridge mounts.

The hydrographics coating of camouflage film on the stock was my idea as I felt it would serve me better than the wood finish for a hunting rifle in the High Country - and I prefer a wooden stock to synthetic for



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**OVER 50 RECIPES**





**A 'before' shot of the gun minus its old Tasco World Class 3-9x scope from 30 years ago.**

recoil absorption. So hydrographics it was and the Vista pattern was chosen to fit in with High Country forestry and cover.

The barrel blueing had been damaged in the flooded safe and rather than re-blue the barrels I opted for a Cerakote coating which is precisely as it sounds, a ceramic coating baked on to the cleaned barrels. I chose this option as Cerakote has excellent resistance to rust, far above that of blueing and when hunting in the High Country it's not uncommon to have lengthy periods of rain or drizzle. The magazine and scope mounts which would otherwise be blued were all cleaned and filed by hand then sprayed and baked in the oven along with all trigger parts to ensure the firing mechanism was also protected.

Last but not least John suggested the bolt be coated with Micro Slick, another Cerakote process similar to a Teflon-like coating which enables the bolt to slide in the receiver with improved performance. Miall's was one of the Australian agents for each of these processes and John's workshop was well set to complete the job to a high standard.

Putting all this together was a task in itself as there are many operators advertising the various processes but having it all done under one roof by a trained gunsmith was a bonus. Fitting of the KDF recoil and muzzle-brake was necessary to overcome the barrel bulge at the muzzle and the gun wouldn't group better than 4" at 100m before the refurbishment.



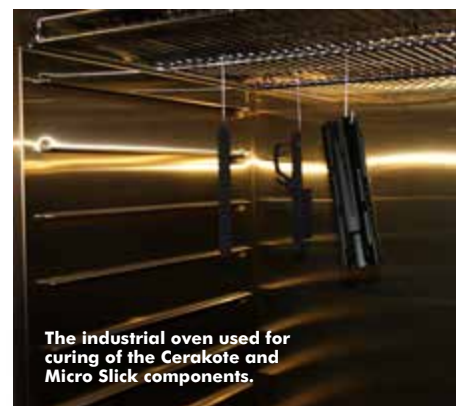
**All the parts of the firing mechanism are spray-coated with Cerakote before being baked in an industrial oven.**

Trimming off the crown on a damaged muzzle is always best done by a gunsmith as alignment of the KDF muzzle-brake must be precise to be coaxial with the rifle bore, not concentric with the outer profile of the barrel and once fitted this can be screwed on and off as desired. The trade-off to recoil reduction, 'guesstimated' to be in the vicinity of 20 per cent, is increased noise and on a KDF Recoil Comparison Chart the Winchester in .30-06 Springfield's felt-recoil was equivalent to that of a .243, which is not insignificant.

Cerakote treatment of the firing mechanism on the trigger system is highly recommended to avoid moisture and grit causing rusting over an extended period or when hunting in moist or wet conditions as it's just 'cleaner' to maintain. The hydrographics coating in Vista configuration suited the muted grey colour of the barrel and camouflage I was after for the Winchester Model 70. This involved rubbing down the stock with any holes or scratches filled before a base coat was applied and then dipped in the



**The wooden stock was in good condition to make application of the hydrographics a bit easier.**



**The industrial oven used for curing of the Cerakote and Micro Slick components.**



**Miall's gunsmith John Kenyon displays the progress as the hydrographics are completed and barrel Cerakoted.**



**Micro Slick coating on the bolt is black and helped with noticeable improvement in cycling.**



'hydrographics' bath to accept transfer of the camouflage pattern.

The base coat is a tough and resilient waterproof layer which assists with adhering of the hydrographics film and the quality of hydrographics coating was immediately obvious with the absence of air bubbles, always a giveaway if the job's not up to par. Don't forget that with constant wear the hydrographics will eventually deteriorate but for most purposes this won't occur for several years depending on use and treatment of the firearm.

When all was completed and the rifle reassembled I was highly impressed by the finished work from Miall's gunsmiths. The shop has a 40m underground range and the rifle was shot-in with 220-grain Remington ammunition I had on hand and the groups were markedly pulled in. The barrel had obviously seen a great deal of work during those 27 years out of my hands but the groups were roped into around  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1" in the underground range, more than adequate to take a sambar deer out to at least 200m.

While the whole exercise wasn't cheap, for that beloved rifle which has served you well, a refurbishment means your faithful

hunting companion will last another 30 years or more. I was thoroughly impressed with the job done by the Miall's team and actually have an old Brno Model 2 .22 rifle that looks like it could do with a little tender loving care. Perhaps that'll be my next project. ●

**John believes the old Winchester will reign again after refurbishment.**



# Australia likely to follow US in military hardware

John Maxwell

**T**he US military is adopting a new service cartridge and Australia will likely follow as we did twice before when the US (and NATO) moved to 7.62 then 5.56. With the latest cartridge come two additional US infantry innovations developed by SIG Sauer USA - a rifle and light machinegun (LMG) - a significant step as not for 65 years has the US military implemented a revamped ammunition and equipment system.

The cartridge is the 6.8x51 and resembles the familiar 7.62x51 (308 Winchester) necked down to 6.8mm which in civilian shooting terms is .270 calibre. The big difference is a stainless-steel base with aluminium locking washer attached to a conventional brass body which allows much higher operating pressures than an all-brass case - 80,000psi as against 62,000psi for the 7.62 - and superior ballistics driving the new standard 135-grain projectiles at 3000fps with improved long-range performance and against modern body armour.

SIG Sauer is already marketing a civilian version called the .277 Fury with warnings they should only be fired in rifles able to withstand higher pressures. The downside to high chamber pressures is potentially accelerated barrel erosion and greater stresses and wear on parts. The Australian Army has been following US developments but says no decision has been made to move from the in-service 5.56 and 7.62 cartridges, Steyr rifle and Minimi and MAG58 LMGs.

"The ADF is aware of the US Army decision to adopt the Next Generation Squad Weapon and 6.8mm calibre. No decision has been taken within the ADF," a spokesperson told *Australian Shooter*. Considering the US is our closest ally whom the ADF has worked in tandem with in operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere and will surely do so in future, do we really have a choice?

"Logistical commonality with the US is always a consideration when developing

future capability, however this must be balanced with self-reliance," the spokesperson said, adding the Army still felt the in-service 5.56mm remained a lethal round. "However as technology continues to improve, materials related to soldier protection and options capable of delivering more energy on to a target at greater ranges warrant exploration to ensure ADF combatants retain overmatch."

Since Federation, Australia has fielded three military rifle cartridges and matching infantry rifles. Up to the late 1950s Australian soldiers carried the .303 SMLE but as the US, UK, NATO and many others moved to the 7.62 NATO cartridge Australia followed, taking up the L1A1 SLR. In 1963 the US favoured the 5.56 cartridge and what became known as the M16 rifle, both better suited to the escalating war in the jungles of Vietnam. Some Australian soldiers in Vietnam carried M16s though the SLR remained the primary infantry reliance. In 1977, NATO nations agreed to



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**XM5**  
MCX-SPEAR

**XM250**  
SIG-LMG

**NGSW-6.8X51**  
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## NEXT GENERATION SQUAD WEAPONS

First look at the latest SIG Sauer offerings.

The SIG Sauer seems the real deal.



opt for the 5.56 round and Australia again followed, choosing the Austrian Steyr AUG rifle and Minimi LMG in 5.56 (official year of initial use was 1988 hence the F88 designation of the Steyr).

Australia also stood up 5.56 production at a new plant at Benalla, Victoria using propellant from nearby Mulwala, both run by defence company Thales which also operates the Lithgow small-arms factory. During the past decade the F88 has undergone a comprehensive refresh and is now termed the Enhanced F88 (EF88), a much-improved rifle the Army sees continuing into the 2030s. Special Forces have always preferred the M4 and never really took to the Steyr.

Army is conducting a broader refresh of all its small-arms through what's called Lethality System Project (Land 159). Tranche 1, which includes replacing the venerable Browning handgun, is well under way while Tranche 2 will consider a replacement assault rifle in the second

half of this decade. Emerging from conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan the US concluded its small-arms performed pretty well, though with some caveats about the effectiveness of the 5.56 round. In Afghanistan, insurgents initiated many contacts at ranges beyond 300m which is outside most effective 5.56 capabilities while hardy insurgents occasionally managed to continue fighting after taking 5.56 hits, an issue likely to be magnified when confronting peer adversaries wearing modern body armour.

Over the years various steps were taken to enhance small-arms' lethality. The 5.56 cartridge started out with a 55-grain projectile but now fires a 62-grain and where once soldiers used guns equipped with iron (open) sights, optical sights are now the norm with increased hit probability. Many armies, including Australia, added designated marksmen to small units with a soldier equipped with a 7.62 calibre rifle able to place accurate fire at longer range.

But even with special loadings the 5.56 cartridge had gone about as far as it could

and what was needed was more lethality than 5.56 but lighter weight than the 7.62.

In 2017 the US Army launched the Next Generation Squad Weapon (NGSW) program, considering replacements for the 5.56 and 7.62 cartridges, M4 rifle, M249 LMG (their version of the Minimi) and M240 LMG (their version of the MAG58). Since World War One military ballisticians have appreciated that calibres in the category of 6.5 to 7mm projectiles sat in a sweet spot, featuring the best combinations of projectile mass and ballistic performance. The 2017 US Small Arms Ammunition Configuration Study concluded defeat of body armour could only be achieved with heavier projectiles at higher velocities which meant higher chamber pressures and from that the US military decided the new cartridge would be in 6.8mm calibre with a 135-grain projectile as standard.

## Australia likely to follow US in military hardware

It adopted the unusual stance of providing the 6.8 projectiles and leaving it to companies competing in the NGSW program to come up with a suitable cartridge and rifles to fire them. That came down to a shortlist of three - SIG Sauer US, General Dynamics and Textron Systems - each proposing its own cartridge design and firearms. During a 27-month trial period more than 1000 soldiers along with Marines and Special Forces tried out the new equipment and in April the US military announced SIG Sauer was the winner with its M5 rifle, a derivative of its MCX and M250 belt-fed LMG, both chambered for the new 6.8x51 cartridge.

Technically both releases remain in the experimental stage and their official designations are XM5 and XM250 though final specifications may change. The first will be in soldiers' hands by October of next year and in all the US Army plans to buy 107,000 M5 rifles and 13,000 M250 LMGs under a US\$4.7 billion contract with SIG Sauer.

If you're American and well-off you can already buy a self-loading civilian version in the SIG MCX Spear for US\$7999 (ammo in 6.8 is in short supply). The US military has awarded Olin Winchester, which operates the Lake City Ammunition Plant in Missouri, a US\$15 million contract to design a new base for NGSW ammunition and until then SIG Sauer will supply the cartridges. The extended phase-in of the new components means existing guns and their ammunition will be around for years.

So what's so special about these new arrivals and their ammo? The US Army has revealed few details of the round's actual ballistics other than assurances it delivers greater energy at close and long ranges than current systems. The new cartridge is heavier than 5.56 but apparently a bit lighter than 7.62 and at 9.84lb



The newly-developed ammunition.

with suppressor, an unloaded M5 is 2lb heavier than an unloaded M4. The M250 is 4lb lighter than the M249 and to put that in perspective, the M5 weighs about the same as the Legacy Australian SLR.

Both new firearms feature a number of innovations with each boasting a combined suppressor and flash hider to manage what would otherwise be ferocious muzzle blast. The M5 is gas-operated with a short-stroke piston and rotating bolt with 15.3" barrel, readily changeable to calibres such as 7.62 NATO or 6.5 Creedmoor. It has controls similar to the M4 but ambidextrous, retaining the AR pattern ambidextrous cocking handle with the addition of a non-reciprocating cocking handle on the left.

To maximise hit capabilities there was a separate contest for a new optic won by US firm Vortex with the M157 Fire Control Unit (FCU), at its heart a 1-8x30 scope with first focal plane reticle. This isn't derived from any existing Vortex optic and was developed from the ground up for the

NGSW program. Many of the fine details remain classified, including weight, though Vortex says it's lighter than a comparable optic with a mounted laser rangefinder. The FCU includes an integrated ballistics calculator for the 6.8 cartridge, laser rangefinder, IR and visible aiming lasers, digital compass and environmental sensors, presumably for temperature and maybe air pressure, along with the ability to wirelessly network with other soldiers.

Vortex says their scope passed the full array of US military durability tests and feels ease of use was a key design consideration - to range a target the soldier simply presses a button and the scope calculates holdover and windage, displaying aiming point on the reticle. The US military is looking to buy 250,000 units which means Vortex won't be supplying the civilian market any time soon but says it will consider that down the track, though likely without some of those military-specific capabilities. ●



Another view of the US military's potential next option.





Clive Pugh, left, with Winchester Australia marketing coordinator Michael Kakouris.

# Winchester Australia and the post-pandemic market

Rachael Oxborrow

While Australia's firearms industry wasn't immune to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on day-to-day operations, one major distributor was still able to report several monthly sales records amid the chaos with Winchester Australia managing director Clive Pugh saying shooting activity remained a constant outside the nation's hard lockdowns of the past two years.

"In recent years we've seen a growth in pistol demand in Australia and despite the sodden summer and autumn in parts of the country, we do know that good rain leads to high numbers of animals and consequently a positive reaction in shooting activity," Mr Pugh said.

## Pre-pandemic

In early 2019 just before the pandemic stopped the world in its tracks, Winchester's Australian manufacturing capabilities were shut down. Mr Pugh said at the time there was an outpouring of emotion, mostly lamenting the loss of manufacturing and ammunition supply,

this despite only field and target shotshell, field rimfire, some pistol, .223 and .308 being made here and a lot of which was earmarked for export.

"To many people all Winchester ammo came from the Geelong factory which is definitely not the case," Mr Pugh said. "All up we made about 80 million rounds across roughly 30 different configurations which by ammo standards is a high volume but just a narrow selection of what Winchester makes. By comparison the US Winchester factories produce hundreds of times the quantity and hundreds of times the calibre configurations than we ever did in Australia."

The impact of rising production and overseas export costs when compared to Winchester's US and other European factories, lack of new investment in more modern equipment and increased competition in the Australian manufacturing market all combined to force closure of the local factory.

## Pandemic peak

"Little did we know COVID would soon arrive and cause havoc in Australia, limiting people's ability to get out and shoot, putting pressure on retail stores and seeing an immediate decline in sales," Mr Pugh said. "For Winchester Australia, ammunition supply kept flowing all through 2020 and 2021 resulting in some of our best sales months pre or post-COVID."

But it wasn't all plain sailing. "Initially our sales fell when COVID first came to Australia and we became eligible for JobKeeper which allowed us to continue operating," he said. "We created a work-force bubble, segregating our warehouse team from the office staff and allowing people to work from home, a strategy which kept our warehouse COVID-free and we never lost a day of despatch. What we found after the lockdowns at the backend of 2020 was retailers re-stocked and that generated a sales boom."

During the tough 2020-'21 spell Australians experienced changing restrictions, work from home orders and lockdowns and as firearms industry retailers

## Winchester Australia and the post-pandemic market

reduced stock and held on to cash, Winchester was forced to increase prices as the cost of goods and importation rose.

### Post-COVID markets

With the uncertainty of lockdowns behind us now allowing for a relatively stable environment to continue operations, he said the real challenge this year has been getting stock into Australia. According to Mr Pugh the stock shortage has been created by a perfect storm of overseas factors including the election of US President Joe Biden, war in Europe, Remington USA going bankrupt and the “shadow of COVID” still causing labour shortages worldwide.

“The uncertainty in the US and concerns over personal safety has driven unprecedented demand for firearms and ammunition in America,” Mr Pugh said. “The US surge has had a real impact on our market in Australia and the bankruptcy of Remington USA added to the issues, affecting availability of ammo to export markets.” If that wasn’t enough to deal with he said the cost of raw materials for manufacturing guns and ammunition - steel, lead, copper and zinc - have all risen substantially in the past 12 months. “This resulted in ongoing increases in the cost of those items and potential for supply shortages in the second half of 2022.”

### Impacts at home

During 2021 the domestic firearms market was forced to further adapt to changing conditions when FedEx-TNT announced it would stop transporting firearms and related products without notice or consultation. The resulting industry uproar prompted Nationals Senator Bridget



The Winchester warehouse never lost a day of despatch.

McKenzie and Country Liberals Senator for the Northern Territory Dr Sam McMahon to intervene and lead a committee, which included SSAA representation, to meet Australia Post in a bid to find an alternative transport option. The \$2 billion a year Australian firearms industry was effectively stopped in its track by this news, including Winchester Australia.

“Our partner of 35 years gave us one month’s notice of this happening, which they did graciously extend to two months,” Mr Pugh said. “It has taken us six months to come close to having a solution that meets the needs of the market and this has resulted in an increase in cost and reduction in delivery frequency for some parts of Australia.”

He said work was still being done in this area as the Western Australian Government had flagged changes to regulations on the movement of firearms and firearm parts. “The challenge for our industry is to bring fact and not emotion to our discussions with regulators and politicians,” he said. “If we could unite our voice into one representative body on the regulatory issues facing our industry and our hobby we’d be able to have greater and ongoing success.”

As Winchester continues to navigate the current market conditions Mr Pugh said frequent meetings with brand partners, shipping and transport suppliers to ensure good relationships and strong communication between all stakeholders was an important part of shoring-up the supply chain. “Our team works extended days to join in discussions with the US and Europe to find ways to move products more efficiently,” he said. “It’s an ongoing challenge which we really enjoy and each day brings another challenge be it cost, regulatory or shipping-related.”

He credits the success of the company through its recent demands to a great team of staff banding together. “Right now we have one of the best groups of people I’ve had working for Winchester Australia and our commitment to the shooting sports has never been stronger,” he said.

• Clive Pugh addressed the SSAA National 2022 Annual General Meeting in May and offered insight into operating during the pandemic. SSAA National executive thanks both Mr Pugh and Nationals Senator Bridget McKenzie, who was also in attendance, for their time. ●



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





The mini-shell slug load pushes a 25gr slug at 1300fps.



# Small wonder

Aguila mini-shells made a major impression on Daniel O'Dea

**F**ounded in 1961 in Mexico and with production both in its home country and Texas, Aguila Ammunition is reportedly one of the largest manufacturers of rimfire, centrefire and shotshells in the world. Newly represented in Australia, Aguila pride themselves on innovation and one of their more interesting products would have to be their 12-gauge mini-shells which local distributor Raytrade sent for review.

So what are mini-shells, what can you use them in and what would you use them for? The first part of the question is answered in the name as they're literally a miniature 12-gauge shotgun shell, at least miniature in length. The most commonly used 12-gauge shell these days have a length of 2¾" (70mm), historically 2.5" (63.5mm) shells were once also not uncommon, while 3" (76mm) and even 3.5" (89mm) shells also exist but are somewhat of a novelty and rarely seen nowadays, these longer shells mainly being the reserve of North American geese hunters.

Much shorter than their compatriots, Aguila mini-shells have a length of just 1¾" (44.5mm) making them a full one inch or 25-odd millimetres shorter than a standard

12-gauge shotshell. The theory as I understand it is that due to modern propellants and cartridge design, the performance of these mini-shells is almost equivalent to that of many lighter-recoiling (lower power) derivatives of full length (2¾") shells available on the market.

Now there's always been a market for lighter-recoiling 12-gauge shells, with lower-recoiling 28 and 24-gram loads dominating clay target sports for example. For hunting, lighter field loads have also always found a home and are used for training youngsters or for that matter anyone else who may be averse to recoil. So effectively Aguila mini-shells closely mimic low-recoil 12-gauge performance in a pint-size package providing a unique advantage - you can potentially jam upwards of 50 per cent more of them in your tubular magazine shotgun to significantly increase capacity.

Unfortunately this benefit may not likely be realised by a majority of Australian shooters for a couple of reasons, firstly restrictions on semi and pump-action shotguns and secondly firearm magazine capacity regulations. Potentially you could use these shells in a straight-pull or lever-action shotgun with a tubular magazine.

The question will be that if you do so and load your magazine above the listed capacity per the firearms registration, does this change the firearm to a higher category of licence or permit? Of course firearms laws vary from state to state and are often interpreted subjectively within each individual state as well so I'm not giving legal advice here, just advising to tread lightly and ensure you stay legal in whatever jurisdiction you're licensed.

These mini-shells come in three loadings. First up we have a ⅝ oz of 7½ sized shot at 1200fps which Aguila promote as: "The perfect option for anyone new to competition clay shooting, offering less recoil and quiet report." Certainly the velocity is equal to many light-recoiling 2¾" shells but naturally ⅝ oz (18g) of shot against ⅞ oz is always going to deliver thinner patterns. The only way to see if they'd work was to shoot some clays which I did and I concur the shells will break clays effectively if you play your part - shoot them quick though before they get too far away. Likewise they're both quiet and low recoiling, in fact recoil was almost non-existent in my over-and-under Trap gun.

The second offering was another ⅝ oz

## Small wonder



payload but this time a shot cocktail of both 4B x 7 and 1B x 4 buckshot for 11 pellets in total. For the record, 4B buckshot are 6.1mm in diameter and 1B are 7.62mm or .30 cal with 1200fps velocity. To test these I set up a target about 350 x 350mm at 25m and used a 20" Remington 870 I had on licence with rifle sights and improved cylinder. Shots on target put half the pellets within a dinner plate while halving the distance tightened up the group size significantly so again, this would be effective at close range.

Last up was a 7/8 oz 25-gram slug load at 1300fps delivering about 1300 ft-lb of energy at the muzzle. By comparison a solid slug from a 2 3/4" shell generally turns out at about 1600fps for around 2500 ft-lb of muzzle energy so a fair bit less but 1300 ft-lb of energy is still quite deadly (think 'Brown Bess' ballistics, meaning similar energy to some black powder muzzle-loaders). Accuracy was good and I managed a three-shot group at 25m with two rounds within an inch of centre and one flying slightly high but all still under 3".

So what would you use these mini-shells for? In Australia I see them as a great training tool for either starting people out on shotguns minus the recoil and noise or even just practice without pain for the recoil-shy. Likewise they could work well in some three gun-style competitions be it IPSC or single-action. These mini-shells

should deliver the goods on most targets encountered in these disciplines while light-recoiling loads mean quick recovery for follow-up shots. In the field at moderate distances in the appropriate application they should also work just fine, pest birds around the orchard springing to mind.

Unfortunately the only part of the equation not so mini is the price. Packaged in boxes of 20, you can expect to pay upwards of two bucks a bang for the slugs or buckshot and about \$1.50 each for the 7 1/2s, more than your standard 12-gauge 2 3/4 equivalents but pretty much in line with other novelty-type shells. Once you overcome that they're a unique little soft-recoiling shell and a lot of fun to shoot. ●



With two shots fired, most of the buckshot landed on the 350 x 350mm target at 25m.







Long-range shooting prone is where the stock chassis shines.

# Flat mate

Accurate Mag 700 chassis a handy alternative, says Chris Redlich

It would be fair to say most shooters these days are spoilt for choice when it comes to aftermarket stock designs. The pages of our magazine are full of advertisements for alternate stock arrangements and configurations, so it's no wonder we can be left scratching our heads when trying to decide on which stock would suit best.

I admit I've leant towards traditional stock designs for most of my rifles, although dabbling with a couple of thumb-hole arrangements in recent years I've often overlooked the practicality of a pistol-gripped tactical-style stock chassis. The opportunity arose when I was asked

to review the Accurate Mag 700 flat-top chassis from Australian distributor Raytrade, so I decided to cast my prejudices aside and put it to the test.

## Accurate Mag 700 explained

This flat-top chassis has been inspired and developed from military standards to fulfil the needs of hunters and long-range shooters. At first glance the stock displays many similarities to the popular M4 and AR-style platform which in the US has a particularly strong influence in design. Accurate Mag has moulded the flat-top chassis to be broken into three key

component groups consisting of the fore-end, centre section and buttstock brackets.

The system is devised to use advanced cad/cam software and is produced by high precision CNC machining with components made from 6061-T6 aircraft grade aluminium to help reduce wear without sacrificing strength (high-stress parts deemed to incur plentiful wear are steel). The aluminium is given a tough anodise finish to military grade prior to coating with stocks finished in what Accurate Mag refers to as KG Guncote in a variety of flat, low-viz colours including desert sand (supplied), black granite, flat dark earth and burnt



Classic stock and rifle ready for the transition to tactical.



The buttstock group boasting a generous recoil pad, fully adjustable cheekpiece and length of pull.

## Flat mate

bronze. All steel parts are finished with a black oxide Cerakote.

Key component of the Accurate Mag 700 is the centre section which provides a solid bedding surface to attain best accuracy and consistency from your action. This section is attached to the receiver by mating the recoil lug to the chassis lug recess and fastening securely with supplied front and rear action screws. It includes an integrated magazine well to accept a supplied detachable box magazine allowing for fast follow-up shots and ease of use, the magazine of pressed steel and holding five staggered medium cartridges. It fits flush to the well and is easily removed by pushing forward the release lever with the non-master thumb. The rounds glide smoothly off the polymer follower and the spring is extremely strong which helps promote reliable feeding.

Rounding out the centre section's most important feature and a critical part of its overall appeal is the superb feel of the pistol grip which is ambidextrous and contoured to mould universally to the majority of shooters' hands. The durable rubber coating relieves any stress related to gripping a cold metallic object while providing a positive and comfortable hold in wet conditions. The buttstock group came already attached to the centre section but can be removed or adjusted for length of pull simply by undoing the cylindrical lock nut then rotating the threaded buttstock shaft in or out of the female recess of the centre section.

The group includes an ambidextrous and fully adjustable cheekpiece whose frame has machined slots allowing for vertical and lateral adjustments with a simple loosening and tightening of Allen screws. The entire cheekpiece is solid rubber which adds to a positive cheek rest when sighting and

additionally is entirely removable via a large thumb nut, a process necessary for barrel cleaning. Although the test rifle in 22-250 has little recoil, the rubber pad is soft enough to tame any heavy kickers.

Rounding out the three component groups is a one-piece fore-end which slips over the barrel with the underside section held by two large Allen screws to female threads in the centre section. The upper segment mates perfectly to the receiver top mount screws with shims supplied to ensure a true fit and has an integral full-length Picatinny rail for universal scope-mounting. Accurate Mag 700 flat-top chassis stocks are available in long and short-action options to suit one of the world's most popular rifles, the Remington Model 700 (hence 'Accurate Mag 700') and conveniently I own one.

Despite the 'Big Green' enduring its fair share of challenges recently, Remington 700s are still a preferred choice of action for building custom rifles and mine is a 'medium varmint', short-action chambered in 22-250 Rem and what I felt was a good option for testing the chassis. The time had come to transform the Remington from its original classic walnut stock and I was keen to test the review stock on its practicality.

The flat-top chassis came supplied with all the right bits for fitment including bolts and spacers at key points and after completing stock assembly I fitted the fore-end with a Javelin bipod mount fastened to the sling stud thread. These great bipods were the subject of a previous review and I thought the Javelin Pro Hunt Tac would suit the stock for a practical rest. The second accessory added was a GPO 3-10x50 Spectra scope and GPO ring mounts, fastened securely to the Picatinny rail. With a few simple adjustments of the Allen screws I

had the cheekpiece located comfortably and made a final tweak to the scope for correct eye relief.

Although the flat-top chassis was inspired by the M4 in regard to appearance and pistol grip the similarities end there. You can expect your fully kitted bolt-action rifle to weigh more than a standard M4 and all up my Remington 700 weighed 5.7kg scoped and loaded. For that reason alone I chose not to take it for general walk-around hunting, though your new outfit will accurately outshoot any M4 at extended ranges and the weight is negligible when walking to your long-range hunting destination. Note: M4 self-loaders are not available to the general public in Australia.

Finally a break in the weather enabled me to put some rounds downrange. I had the rifle sighted and while shooting with a military-style stock off the bench took some getting used to, the 22-250 shot consistent sub-MOA groups. Lying prone on the other hand, plinking long-range steel targets was where the flat-top chassis felt right at home and I suspect that's where its military design gives an advantage. Coupled with the Javelin bipod, the entire set-up was comfortable and provided a stable platform for long-range shooting.

### Conclusion

To convert a standard Remington 700 rifle to a tactical-style outfit, the US-made Accurate Mag 700 flat-top chassis offers quality choice in a competitive market. For the complete stock arrangement as reviewed you can expect to pay \$1495 (retail at time of writing) with additional magazines available for \$225. Accurate Mag cover their products with a 12-month warranty. More at raytrade.com.au ●



Centrepiece of the chassis is undoubtedly the super-comfortable pistol grip.



Accuracy consistency wasn't affected by the stock change.





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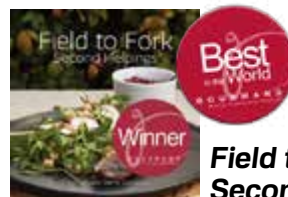
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## National

### National Junior Rimfire Field Rifle Postal Championships

June 1-October 31, 2022

All clubs and branches

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

### SSAA Combined Services National Postal Shoot

June 1-September 19, 2022

All clubs and branches.

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

### Muzzleloading Postal Shoot

August 1-December 17, 2022

All locations

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

### Target Pistol National Championships

September 16-18, 2022

SSAA Alice Springs

Program - Friday: Practice; Saturday and Sunday: Competition. Contact: secretary@ssaalicesprings.com.au

### Sporting Clays National Championships

September 17-18, 2022

SSAA Wodonga, Vic

Program: 200 target event with 100 each day, Squad 1 Saturday reverse on Sunday (practice on Sept. 16). Facilities: Limited camping on-site, catering over weekend. Contact: Josh Knight 0488 970 293.

### 5-Stand National Championships

September 24-25, 2022

SSAA Shepparton, Vic

Program: 200-target event with 100 per day over four grounds, squads run in reverse on second day (there's a midweek competition on Sept. 21). Facilities: Limited camping on-site, catering over the weekend. Contact: Tony Connell 0419 331 374.

### SSAA Combined Services National Championships

September 30-October 2, 2022

Central Queensland Shooting Complex, Gladstone, Qld.

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

### SSAA IMHSA National Championships

September 30-October 7, 2022

SSAA (ACT) Majura

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

### Lever Action National Championships

October 1-3, 2022

SSAA Alice Springs, NT

Full details on National website. Contact: Jim Ellis 0418 675 526 or leveraction@disciplines.ssaa.org.au

### SSAA Long Range Precision National Championships

October 15-16, 2022

SSAA Luna branch, Captains Mountain Range, Qld  
Program: October 14: Range open for zero checking. October 15: Match 1 700m; Match 2 800m. October 16: Match 3 900m; Match 4 1000m. Facilities - Cabins and camping; Bunkhouse \$15/night; cabin single occupancy \$40; double occupancy \$30 per person; campsite \$12/night. Contact: Richard White.

### Rifle Metallic Silhouette National Championships

April 7-11, 2023

Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA

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

### Lever Action Silhouette National Championships

April 13-16, 2023

Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA

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

## NSW

### SSAA (NSW) Combined Services State Championships

September 16-18, 2022

Windamere Regional Shooting Complex, NSW

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

## WA

### SSAA (WA) Scoped 3P & Field Rifle State Championships

September 24-26, 2022

Bedfordale, Perth, WA

Program: September 23 practice; 24 Field Rifle centrefire; 25 Field Rifle rimfire, Scoped 3P rimfire, dinner and presentation; 26 Scoped 3P centrefire. Facilities: Toilets, showers, barbecue, clubhouse, unpowered and limited powered campsites. Contact: wazzac70@gmail.com

## SA

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

September 3-4, 2022

SSAA Para, Greenwith, SA

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

## Qld

### Queensland NRA Pistol Metallic Silhouette Postal Shoots

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

## NT

### Big Game Rifle National Championships

October 7-9, 2022

Micket Creek Shooting Complex, Darwin

Program: Range open October 7 for practice, 8-9 for competition. Nominations close September 9. Facilities: Toilets on-site with disabled facilities, barbecue lunch provided for all competitors, no camping or caravans. Contact: Joe Libro ntbiggamerifle@gmail.com

## Tas

### SSAA (Tas) 5-Stand State Championships

November 4-6, 2022

T11 Huon Combined Shooting Club, Tas

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

### SSAA (Tas) Lever Action Silhouette State Championships

March 11-13, 2023

Westbury Shooting Club, Tas

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

### SSAA National Event Cancellation/Postponement Policy

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

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



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## SSAA Member Alert

Please be aware that state  
and territory police firearms  
registries regularly cross-  
check firearm licences and  
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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.

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

[ssaa.org.au](http://ssaa.org.au)

# SSAA MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

ABN 95 050 209 688

SSAA Membership Office, PO Box 282, Plumpton, NSW 2761

Phone 02 8805 3900 Fax 02 9832 9377 Email [membership@ssaa.org.au](mailto:membership@ssaa.org.au)

NEW ☐ RENEWAL ☐ Have you been a member before? Yes/No

Membership No.

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Title (PLEASE CIRCLE) Mr Miss Ms Mrs Other ..... Preferred SSAA Branch

First name

Middle name

Last name

Residential address

Town/suburb State Postcode

Postal address

Town/suburb State Postcode

(IF DIFFERENT FROM ABOVE)

Phone (Mobile) (Home)

Email

Date of birth Male ☐ Female ☐ Member referral number if applicable

☐ Tick to subscribe to the FREE SSAA National E-newsletter via email

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Each membership category (apart from Family Member) includes 11 issues of the Australian Shooter magazine per year.

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☐ \$72

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### SIGN UP ONLINE



[ssaa.org.au](http://ssaa.org.au)

## PLEASE READ AND SIGN

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

SIGNATURE:.....

DATE:.....

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

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

## ATTENTION NSW & ACT MEMBERS

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

- ☐ TARGET SHOOTING (longarms only)
- ☐ HUNTING (club membership)
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MEMBERS FIREARMS PROTECTION

August 2022

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Enclosed is payment for the amount of \$.....

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Card number

Expiry date Signature.....

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# Enter and win

Simply write your full name, address and contact number on a piece of paper and place it inside an envelope and send to:

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SSAA National  
PO Box 2520, Unley, SA 5061

Competitions close September 30, 2022



Or enter online  
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# Winners!

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**Best Shots Mug**  
Anthony Beyer, Vic

**Winchester Prize Pack**  
Troy Davies, Vic

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Peter Thistleton, NSW

**Junior Prize  
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## Better days . . . and moving on

**T**his winter past I parted company with some old friends and first to go were my Meindl hunting boots.

Brand new in 2012, I wore them everywhere with their first outing being a five-day elk hunt in the dry and dusty high desert country of Utah. Though the going was tough there were no issues with comfort, even if the new leather did squeak a little.

From there we flew up to Wyoming to hunt mule deer and pronghorn antelope in the bad-lands country adjacent to the Big Horn mountains, wet and rolling hill country where they never had a chance to dry. They had to be cleaned regularly and a day of hunting always included stops to scrape away the sticky grey mud that built up on the soles. From there we drove up to Montana where I hunted white tail deer in some of the heaviest frosts I've ever seen and even when it snowed the new boots kept my feet warm and dry.

Back home I applied the recommended layers of leather dressing and went back to normal hunting mode in hill country. Every winter meant river crossings and hard climbing in the steep stuff and once again they provided maximum performance with a minimum of care. There were trips to South Australia and the Top End which included everything from the dusty flatlands to rock climbing in the escarpment country and wading through both fresh and saltwater swamps. I wore them around the yard, in the workshop and any other place my feet needed protection and comfort. My faith in them as unbreakable was complete.

When I put them on early this winter I noticed the rubber around the joint between the soles and upper was cracked and perished. Everything else seemed fine so I didn't worry too much until the first time I went hunting and the front of the soles



**Although they've seen better days it's hard to leave old friends behind.**

separated from the body to become rubbery jaws that opened and closed as I walked. They picked up sticks and twigs, grass and leaves, small rocks and loose dirt, none of which I needed. Though they were probably the best boots I've ever owned they had to go but if anyone ever asks me what brand of boots I'd recommend for serious hunting, my answer will always be Meindl even if they have been replaced by another brand that was available in my time of need.

To add insult to injury I also found my favourite hunting pants didn't fit any more. No excuses there as I'm rounder than I used to be, possibly a direct result of not much hunting during lockdowns. When I

looked to see if a tab could be sewn on to make the waist a little larger, I found the seat of the pants was seriously worn and torn in places. Like the boots they needed replacing.

When the rubberised strap on my binocular harness broke to complete the worn-out trifecta I couldn't help but think of Henry Lawson's *When Your Pants Begin to Go* I'd recently read in a collection of Australian poetry, the main difference being Lawson was lamenting the bad times when his pants (and shoes) started to fail him. I can only recall good times about mine and consider myself lucky they lasted as long as they did as everything wears out eventually, especially hunting gear that's been around so long you can't remember when you didn't have it.

Moving on, the new boots have been comfortable from the start and in the back of my wardrobe I found a pair of hunting pants that were only worn a few times for a magazine review some years ago. At the time I remember them being a little on the large side, something that no longer seems to be a problem. When I was in town the following day I replaced the binocular harness and given I no longer hunt as much or as hard as I used to, I doubt my new additions will ever reach the stage where *they* begin to go. My Good Lady, God bless her, reckons they might even see me out and she could be right as compared to them I'm the one who's seen better days.





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