

Femininity and firearms study • Introducing and becoming a new shooter • Shoot for a Cure NT

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S SHOOTER

High among
the treetops:
a memorable father and
daughter adventure



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Editorial

Gemma Dunn



It can be a little daunting for newcomers moving into sports shooting, so I provide some key tips on how to best approach the situation and deliver the right encouragement.

We also look at things from the perspective of a new shooter as Elise Cox covers her experiences at the SSAA range after first acquiring her Firearms Licence.

SSAA Academic Bursary Program recipient Emma Belgrove discusses her important studies, including her thesis 'Femininity and firearms: Women's perspectives on firearm ownership, gun control, and gun culture in the Australian context'.

Proud father Scott Heiman takes his excited daughter Scout on a hunting trip to camp among the treetops, where the memories and anticipation for future adventures provide the ultimate reward.

And Laetisha Scanlan is fresh back from the Tokyo Olympics so she tells us all about it, while Renee Barratt wraps up the successful 2021 Shoot for a Cure NT event.

Gemma

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AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S SHOOTER

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Taking aim with Laetisha Scanlan

Reflecting on my Olympic experience – then looking ahead

As I sit here in hotel quarantine, I'm fortunate to have had a substantial amount of time to reflect and digest my thoughts and feelings about the Tokyo Olympics, as well as my own performance.

Firstly, what an unbelievable five-year journey it has been. Never would have picked it – interrupted preparation, a one-year postponement and 18 months with no international competition. Overall, our Australian athletes did us proud with managing to equal our best Olympic performance as a team in the gold medal tally, a true example of our resilience and never give-up attitude as a nation.

I thought it would be nice to share with you all some experiences from my time at the Games. Surprisingly, spitting into a test tube for daily COVID saliva tests quickly became the norm in your day-to-day routine. The Village, as per usual, was grand in size, the Australian building by the far the best. It contained lots of communal lounging areas, a full-time barista, recovery centre which included ice baths and slushie machines, plus a nutrition hub with classic Australian foods to ensure some familiarity to home. And there was a mini gym accessible to only the Aussie athletes to reduce COVID risk.

The Team Australia building was approximately an eight-minute walk to the double storey dining hall which provided all types of cuisines and was open 24/7.

One thing I feared before arriving in Japan was that the atmosphere and the vibe of the athletes and the Games would be different due to the stress of the pandemic. But I was pleasantly surprised to learn that this remained the same as my previous Olympic outing – excitement, nervousness, anticipation and focus, with the added requirement of mask-wearing and strict hygiene protocol.

The weather was extremely hot and humid most days and I lived through my first typhoon while over there. The cardboard beds were incredibly sturdy although the mattresses had the firmness of a concrete slab.

The Japanese volunteers were the most friendly and helpful people I have ever met and I couldn't speak more highly of their beautiful nature and culture. I think Japan did an amazing job considering the cards they were dealt.

The shooting range was built as a temporary structure on military land and was about a one-hour drive from the Olympic



Village. The shotgun range was world-class in design and this was reflected by the huge scores shot in all the disciplines. It's sad to think that this will be the first and last time the range is ever used.

I am gut-wrenchingly disappointed with my own performance, due to being so close to a medal opportunity, but subsequently falling just short to finish fourth. But I am also proud and inspired to learn from this heartache and come back a stronger competitor.

With Paris 2024 only three years away, our bid to win quotas for our team to compete in France will begin at the World Championships next year, so there is little downtime to be had.

While I can't thank everyone enough for the support I have received on this incredible journey, I now look forward to my next chapter and the beginning of a new Olympic cycle – onwards and upwards!

Laetisha with fellow
Olympic shooter
James Willett.





Go climb tree

Scott Heiman

Ever since I can remember, my family has been hunting and fishing. My grandfather was a Rural Protection Board member responsible for baiting rabbits and pigs in the 60s and 70s. He and dad were also clay target champions. So it was little surprise that my childhood meals were commonly pigeon, duck, rabbit, goat or fish – all wild harvested.

They say that apples never land far from the tree. And so, it seems, is the case with our daughter. Before she was born, one of the first items we bought for our little girl was a baby carrier backpack.

Our aim was to ensure that she would be able to come where we wanted to go. In this way, we could maintain some normalcy to our lifestyle once we became a family unit. And, importantly, she would be involved in everything right from the get-go. So, she came along for the ride at archery competitions, hunting weekends, fishing and bushwalks. Aptly, we named her Scout.

Passing it on

Scout's first hunting trip with me took place when she was a mere seven months and 27 days old. Was I expecting to see many animals? No, not really. They fled through the undergrowth as she gurgled

and giggled on my back, poking the feathers on my flights and nudging me around as she squirmed to see what was going on.

But, the day was memorable all the same. Imagine how good it felt to come back from a morning's walk with a bow, then sit down for a barbecue T-bone lunch, with Little Miss dressed in camo on my knee. Better still was the sight of her grabbing the bone from my hand to gnaw on it with the gusto of a lion cub on a gazelle's hind leg. That's my girl!

On these early outings together, it didn't really matter if she spoiled my pig stalk by yelling at the top of her lungs "Look daddy. Magpie!" from the comfort of her backpack. The successful hunting happened when she nodded off now and again, or during quiet strolls that I'd take nearer camp while she had some quality downtime among friends and relatives. It was inevitable that most of our outings together ended up as 'nature walks' rather than hunting forays. And that was okay by me. We were together as a family – in the bush – and that was good enough.

Inevitably, things progressed. Once she was steady on her feet and able to walk a distance, I started to teach Scout about stalking by having her sneak up on wombats. Skirting the banks of dams, we

would identify different footprints. We would also stop to see if we could recognise which animals' hair was left snagged in the fence wire. And when a mob of kangaroos took off even though she was sure they hadn't seen her, Scout learned about wind direction – and why it's important.

With these and other basic bush skills under her belt, she joined me on her first hunt when she was seven. With her own bow in hand, she came stalking goats – up hill and down dale – and sneaking up on 'wascally wabbits' in the early morning light. It certainly made this old hunter smile.

All those years of nature walks were beginning to pay off. An episode that will be forever imprinted in my conscious memory is the day I shot my first carp at the NSW DPI Bowfishing trial at Forbes. As soon as I pulled the offending fish from the water, Scout's first words were: "Can we eat it, daddy?" Sure can, Princess.

From hunting, to fishing trips, to archery competitions – I revelled in seeing a new generation of my family going back to basics, learning to hunt ethically, and developing an understanding of where food really comes from. And then there were those moments that served simply to stoke a father's pride. Like Scout's transition from shooting her initial arrow

a

The temperature dropped to 3 degrees while up in the blind but there were no complaints.

from a bow – to winning first place in Cub Girls Longbow at the Australian Bowhunters Association National Safari the following year. If that wasn't cause enough to smile, she backed it up with further wins in Traditional Archery.


Like a rat up a drain pipe

Now, all these outings had made it self-evident that daddy's little princess was becoming a hunter. But I was nevertheless surprised when, during a hunt on a mate's property outside Canberra last year, she suddenly asked: "Daddy, can we sleep up there?" She was pointing to a blind up in the trees.



Family portrait on a hunt.

With these basic bush skills under her belt, she joined me on her first hunt when she was seven. With her own bow in hand, she came stalking goats and sneaking up on 'wascally wabbits'.



From hunting, to fishing trips, to archery competitions – I revelled in seeing a new generation of my family going back to basics...

It's been there for years – since when the property owner was raising his own kids. The blind sits some 5m in the air and, from time to time, we've scrambled up there to watch the passing wildlife – mainly kangaroos and the occasional goat – just too far out of range. On the day Scout posed the question, we were on a day trip with limited supplies. Keen to retain the momentum, I pledged we would come back next weekend to do an overnighter in the hunters' tree-house.

Preparing for the hunt would be a piece of cake. The property is within an hour's drive of home and we would only be away one night. But there would be nothing learned if I simply packed the car and told her to jump in. So, instead, I asked her to consider what she thought we would need and to write up the packing list for us.

After a couple of day's thought, her list looked like this:

- Swags
- Ration packs
- Drinks
- Chairs
- Jumpers
- Camo
- Camera
- Night vision
- Fox whistle
- Torch
- Dad's gun
- Games
- Colouring-in book

A good start for a whipper snapper. I added a PLB, as well as my leg rigs for first-aid and survival gear – just in case something went wrong. Everything else we might need lives in the HiLux permanently. Besides, the blind was only a few hundred metres from the property owner's bush block cabin where we could retreat if Scout had cold feet – either figuratively, or literally.

The day had come

For the entire week, Li'l Miss was acting like her birthday, Christmas and Easter were about to happen on the same day. All week, she was adding to her list with remarks: "Oh, I need to pack the fox whistle Poppy gave me last Christmas."

It looked to me like the week was endless to a young girl enthusing over the prospect of her first tree-top sleepover. Then, on Friday afternoon after school, she hurtled outside to the garage to ensure that we packed the ute properly, by systematically going through her list. Knowing that she had a big weekend ahead of her, she even voluntarily went to bed on time. No cajoling. No messing around.



Wild harvesting from the age of five.

Driving in through the property's gate on Saturday morning, you would have been forgiven for thinking her eyes were about to pop out of her head as she scanned for movement and sign out of the window. The idea was that we'd drive up to the tree blind, unload, set up, including trail cameras, and then take the ute back to the bush block cabin to let things settle down at the hunting site.

Our morning was spent quietly patrolling the boundary fence, looking for recent sign. As we approached a hole in the fence, she suddenly became excited. "Look, daddy. Goat tracks... and deer too!" Now I was beginning to become excited as well.

In the afternoon, we settled into the blind. By sitting in our chairs facing each other, we had the best possible view from the structure's four windows. We could both see obliquely out of the side windows and one of us could look out of the window behind the other. When the time came, I could use the back rest of the chairs as a bench rest.

Once in place, time passed quite quickly. Occasionally, we played silent games of UNO. We alternated that with a travel-sized game of Battleship which saw us taking turns by whispering our targeting co-ordinates to each other, in between glances out of the windows. We also grazed on fruit and American military MRE ration packs (Meals Ready to Eat).

These were a special hit with Scout, and she was particularly amused by the milkshakes which required shaking to make them frothy. The sun moved in its arc, changing the direction of the shadows, and all the while there was not a single complaint. Just a period of quiet contentment, playing games, trying new food and peering into the scrub for the slightest hint of movement.

As the light dimmed, kangaroos hung around nearby. We watched their behaviour, identified the lead male (boomer), and looked on as younger males engaged in boxing fights while the females and joeys grazed. Experiences like this provide an education that many kids will never be able to enjoy.

In this part of the woods, and the time of year we were hunting, sunset comes in at around 5.30pm. After an early dinner, our attention focused on preparing for any crepuscular animals that would appear in the twilight, particularly deer. So, out came the night vision glasses. As we don't have a night vision scope, we also reached for our LED torches so we could spotlight if something came in close enough.

Despite our best efforts, we saw no game in the evening. Undeterred, I woke in the morning before sunrise and sat in my chair looking into the inky blackness waiting for the sunrise to arrive. As black night changed to grey dawn, and then oozed into greens surrounded in fog, Scout slowly stirred. Without prompting, she rose quietly and resumed her chair, watching for signs of life as the fog gradually lifted. Where's the game we wondered? We kept looking, knowing from the sign we'd seen that it was nearby – for sure. And indeed, it was.

While nothing showed itself to us before we finally scrambled out of the blind mid-morning, we hadn't been alone in our outpost 5m off the ground. As we enjoyed a hot Milo at the property's cabin we checked our trail camera footage. Inspecting the photos, we saw the kangaroos that had been grazing nearby us in the late afternoon light. And, there too, just 20 minutes before dawn, were fallow deer. Caught in three separate images. We had been so close.

If I'd been concerned for a second that Scout would be disappointed to have missed out on the deer, my fears were immediately allayed. Looking up through the steam of her hot mug, she smiled and said: "You know what this means don't you, daddy?" "What's that?" I replied. "We have to come back." "Yes kiddo, yes it does," I said with a Cheshire grin on my face.

Which just goes to show, it doesn't take a set of trophy antlers to make a successful hunt.

In the mist of dawn Scout had her first-ever shot at live game.



Emma has enjoyed her interaction with SSAA.

SSAA bursary examines female firearms ownership

Dave Rose

Emma Belgrove's postgraduate project to interview women in the shooting sports across Australia caught the attention of the panel on the SSAA Academic Bursary Program.

As a result it was decided that the organisation would grant a bursary towards helping Emma further her ambitious quest to wrap up her degree in Criminology.

Having already earned a Bachelor of Arts in Criminology in 2017 at the University of Queensland, 29-year-old Emma saw this opportunity as the logical next step.

Emma was based on the University of Queensland campus at St Lucia but has recently moved her educational headquarters.

"I'm now living down in Canberra because my partner landed a job opportunity but I'm able to remotely talk to my supervisors," she said.

According to Emma, the rise in women's firearms ownership suggests that they will increasingly be part of the gun-owning community and therefore have their own unique experiences as females.

Emma's project focuses on how women engage with an activity that is traditionally masculine and also highly stigmatised.

She feels that there is currently a gap in literature involving women's outlooks on perspectives about firearms ownership and usage within the gun community.

So the mission has seen her conduct interviews with female members of the legal firearms community across the country.

Emma finds that face-to-face interviews prove to be a better form of communication than any video link-up or phone call. She senses that it is easier to build a rapport when talking to people in person and can allow for greater trust between the interviewer and interviewee. Hence the need to travel between states to speak to her subjects. Due to travel restraints, Emma has also found that video link-up has become more successful than ever before.

The venture has also seen Emma pursue overseas connections, which have hit a regrettable hurdle due to the effects of the global pandemic.

One of the harsh realities is that Emma has had to defer travel to participate in a major American Society of Criminology (ASC) conference in Washington DC for obvious reasons. The forum had to be cancelled so now Emma is waiting to see what the next step will be.

"COVID pushed everything back but I've still been able to keep up with my PhD data collections," said Emma.

The many months of research has kept Emma wanting to find out even more. "Women's ownership of firearms in Australia has been on the rise. Why? What we see is a pathway to acceptance," she said.

In spite of the logistical restrictions, Emma has kept a positive mindset as her inquiries continue.

"I haven't been able to travel as much as I would have liked but there have been positives and negatives to my situation," she said.

"I have been able to go to Rockhampton, Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney.

"At some stage I would like to visit Perth or Adelaide."

Along the way she has been grateful for the back-up support from various sources. "The SSAA have been incredibly helpful," said Emma.

"I was able to reach out to clubs and have a chat. Everywhere I went the people were so welcoming."



Emma's project focuses on how women engage with an activity that is traditionally masculine and also highly stigmatised.

What Emma discovered was a truly heartening revelation about the firearms family.

"There are people involved from all walks of life and it's so good to see," she said.

"True, my big data collection has been messed up by COVID. But I have been asking the right questions and I'm sure I'll get there.

"The thesis is actually 80,000 words so it's a major undertaking."

Despite this daunting assignment, Emma has found time to carry out work as a casual academic tutor in the University of Queensland's School of Social Science.

"I have been teaching three classes for the past four to five years. It doesn't take up all my time and it's all down to time management," she said.

"I can tutor any number from 50 to 80 in a virtual situation or perhaps 25 to 30 online. But in a physical setting it's better to leave it between 20 to 24.

Again, Emma has had to adapt to the ever-evolving social norms.

"Internet communication, video calls and Zoom meetings have all become more common," she said.

But in the end, it all comes back to Emma's initial investigation. "Why has women's shooting taken off?" she pondered.

"There has been a big growth through family attitudes. Once it was handed down from father to son but now there is a husband to partner link and a real family element.

"There are changing social attitudes to shooting. It is less frowned upon and there is less of a social stigma than in the days after 1996 when shooting was almost demonised.

"It has taken time but now people apply logic rather than being just prejudiced."

Despite the barriers, Emma knows the finishing line is in sight for her extensive analysis of her chosen topic.

"From my studies, it has been the best time ever," she said.

Women's-only competition

Only female SSAA members are eligible to enter. One entry per member. To enter, simply write your name, address and membership number on the back of an envelope and send it to:

Winchester women's prize pack,
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PO Box 2520, Unley, SA 5061

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Competition closes September 30, 2021

Key tips for bringing a *newcomer* into the sport

Gemma Dunn

Gemma teaching Amelia O'Neill about lead on a clay target at her first sporting competition.

Over the past 10 years, I have introduced thousands of new shooters to our sport through various avenues, primarily Try Shooting events. And in the past couple of months alone, I have spent time with more than 80 individuals, welcoming them to our sport.

“What does this have to do with a practical piece in *Australian Women's Shooter*?” I hear you ask. Well, it's a simple fact that most female shooters become involved through introduction from a male friend or family member (although as our numbers grow, we are seeing more women bringing other women into the SSAA range too, which is exciting).

And for this reason, I feel it is important to not only support our female shooters, but also those people who are doing the introductions. Of course, this advice doesn't have to be solely directed at new female shooters – it applies to all novice shooters.

Through these experiences, coupled with my own as a beginner once, I have come to learn that keeping it simple is probably the most important thing you can do for them in the early stages. One of the biggest comments I receive from people about being a beginner is that there is so much to learn about the world of shooting sports, that it becomes really overwhelming and almost too hard to take part.

This leads to a higher drop-off rate for beginners than should be acceptable. So, it is our job – those who introduce a friend, family member or colleague to the shooting sports, to make it as easy and simple as possible to keep them engaged and having fun. This is especially important for juniors and women as they are vital to our growth and success due to being a largely untapped demographic.

I will outline some key tips you should remember when introducing a beginner to the shooting sports, and how crucial it is to avoid information overload.

Ensure you have suitable equipment

First and foremost, it is imperative that you have or can gain access to suitable equipment for a beginner. What you are used to dealing with and using, may not be appropriate for a beginner and could make or break a person’s experience forever.

It is critical that the main priority when introducing a beginner, is the level of enjoyment they have from pulling the trigger (coupled with safety being paramount too) and equipment plays a huge role in their satisfaction levels.

The key things to cover when it comes to equipment selection are: recoil, gun fit and operational difficulty.

Recoil is the amount of ‘kick’ or impact the firearm has on your body. And it’s generally not smart, nor is it overly funny (despite any YouTube videos you may have seen), to give a beginner something that will completely scare and potentially injure them for their first few times and beyond. So, make the right judgment call and start them off with a comfortable calibre that’s suitable.

With some disciplines of shooting you can’t avoid recoil altogether but there are nearly always options for reducing it. This can be in the form of a recoil pad, shoulder padding, low-recoil ammunition and stance or positioning (ie, shoot from a bench rather than standing).

It is wise to fit or provide plenty of padding to the gun and shoulder of a rifle or shotgun shooter. Keep in mind this will also affect gun fit so make sure you take that into account or tell your stock maker. There are lots of aftermarket products that can be purchased to help with this (see table on right).

Gun fit probably plays one of the largest parts when it comes to reducing recoil other than calibre selection. Having a gun that fits well, will reduce the amount of play the firearm has against the shooter’s body therefore reducing the overall movement and amount of ‘kick’ they feel. The basic principle is making sure you have a gun that fits your beginner well

enough until the option of them having their own gun fitted to them, is available.

For in-depth information on gun fit, head over to read ‘All about the fit’ in Issue 2 of *Australian Women’s Shooter* at ssaa.org.au/women

Finally, it is also wise to have equipment that is easy to use for a shooter’s first few tries. This means if you have the choice between a .22LR bolt-action or a .22LR lever-action, you probably should start with the bolt-action as they are less complicated and less overwhelming for a new shooter to use.

Keep your explanations as simple and effective as possible

This is the biggest impact you can personally have on someone’s experience, so make sure it counts. Chances are that your beginner is already overwhelmed with their new surroundings, the range rules and the fact that they’re shooting a firearm for the first time. So it is important to keep your explanations as straightforward and effective as possible.

Remember to ensure your instructions are simple and start with the basics.

Sometimes it is worth assessing a situation quietly rather than explaining every little detail to your beginner. This will just engulf them and result in information overload. For example, when trying to determine whether or not your shooter has the right amount of eye-relief on a scope, instead of explaining eye-relief to them in depth, just ask: “Can you see any large black rings on the outside when you look through the scope?”

If they say yes, then advise them to move their face forwards or backwards until the picture is clear without any blackness. If they say no, then they’re perfect and just tell them to keep putting their head in the same spot. Ultimately, this achieves the same result as if you had explained eye-relief to them but you might have avoided making them flustered and resulting in them worrying about it too much for the rest of the session.

Sure, understanding eye-relief and head positioning on the stock is really important as a rifle shooter but for a beginner, all they want to do is hit targets and have fun to start with. Once they keep coming back to the range or field and are a lot more comfortable with their surroundings, you can then help them understand the technical aspects of it in a bit more depth.

Recoil pads	Shoulder padding	Low-recoil ammunition
<p>Kick-Eez, LimbSaver, Pachmayr (or similar) recoil pad. Can be bought fitted, ground to fit or slip-on and most gunshops have them in stock.</p> 	<p>Can be in the form of a padded shooting jacket, padded shooting shirts or wearable shoulder pads suitable for both men and women. All vary on the amount of padding provided.</p> 	<p>Most ammunition manufacturers make low-recoil options. Speak to your local gunshop to find out what options are best for your application.</p> 



Lots of fun being had at the Trinity Anglican College SSAA Try Shooting session in Wodonga, Vic.



Gemma (far right) with some of the Trinity Anglican College students who tried shooting for the first time.

Try and have this approach with every aspect of what you are trying to explain to your beginner. Whether it be safety, breathing, trigger control, stance, target trajectory, sights – the list goes on. There is nearly *always* a way to explain these in a simplified manner such as my example. This will be key to ensuring they are comfortable, safe and enjoying being at the range or in the field with you.

Limit the number of information/advice sources at the start

This one could be a bit tricky to manage but it can make all the difference in the world to a new shooter. It is best to try and maintain a single or limited line of contact between a new shooter and who/where they obtain their instruction from.

Naturally, we all have varying styles of communication and ideas about approaching situations and if too many different people are sharing their tips and ideas at once to a new shooter, they will become extremely overwhelmed and confused as each will contrast slightly to what they were originally told.

It is vital for a new shooter to identify the person/couple of people they trust and are comfortable with at the range and try to stick with that person/group, until at least the basics are covered and they are relaxed learning on their own more and more.

There are always plenty of people within the SSAA who want to be welcoming and helpful but sometimes it's hard to take it all in at once. While you don't want to completely ignore their knowledge, it's always safest to try and focus on one thing or technique at a time and save the rest to work on later.

So, the best way to do this is you can thank them for their help and tell them you'll definitely work on that in the future, but for now you're wanting to get comfortable with what you're concentrating on currently.

If you are instructing somebody and you are finding lots of helpful people offering advice it might be wise to have a word with your new shooter beforehand that this might happen and work together on a plan to handle it.

On the other side to this, it is important for the rest of us to appreciate the fine line between being helpful or a hindrance. If you see a new shooter at the range who is already being guided by a parent, friend or Range Officer, you may not quite agree with what is being taught. As long as safety is not in jeopardy, then it's best to do one of two things; leave them be and wait until the shooter has more confidence then maybe pick a better time to offer help. Or if you have a relationship with them/their instructor, have a quiet word to the instructor, without the new shooter

around. That way, the instructor might be able to work on it without too many people crowding the beginner.

Structure your session

It is always good to have a plan in place to slowly introduce your beginner to the basics of sports shooting. As I mentioned at the beginning, I have organised, run and coached at Try Shooting events for beginners for 10 years and I always use the same basic session structure for success:

Introductory targets: Start with the easiest targets so that the beginner can become familiar with the firearms, processes and skills. This is a chance for the instructor to ensure that the beginner is comfortable and doesn't require any additional focus or instruction.

Moderate targets: This is an opportunity for the beginner to focus on refining their skills. They should be comfortable with shooting and the basic processes of shooting (such as loading and handling the firearm safely and correctly). If the beginner is quite skilled at this point, the instructor may move on to the next level fairly quickly.

Game with moderate targets: Here the beginner should be comfortable and prepared to up the ante. This can be done by introducing a little added pressure via a mini-competition or game among themselves – even a friendly wager works



It's always safest to try and focus on one thing or technique at a time and save the rest to work on later.

Amelia then went on to have her dad help her for the rest of the competition, with Gemma always there if they needed any extra help.

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10am - 12pm, 1.30pm - 3.30pm
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TRY SHOOTING
We're for Shooting Enthusiasts & Novices of all abilities



Ensure your beginner is relaxed, safe and having fun. This is the moment they will decide if shooting is for them or not.

well here. This encourages those that are competitive to test out their new-found skills in an enjoyable and exciting way.

Also, by doing this it ensures that your beginner is relaxed, safe and having fun which therefore allows a higher learning aptitude and level of retention. This is a crucial point as it is generally where beginners will decide that they either really enjoy shooting or it's not quite for them.

Learning/information section: At this point in the session, it's always good to show the beginner some different skill sets or disciplines that they can participate in, should they wish to take up the sport. This allows the participants to have a break, retain their level of excitement and fun while also listening to all the other great things about our sport – a fine time to solidify in their minds why they should become a member of the SSAA.

Harder targets: This should be closest to the end of the session when your beginner has had some downtime. The beginner should be challenged by this part of the session but encouraged that with time and practice they will be able to do this without any issue. This shows them that they will be supported and able to be a confident and successful shot over time.

Final game: Finish off the session with a great contest that combines all the varying skills and levels of shooting they experienced during their session. Let the

beginner highlight what their favourite activity was and focus the game around that.

This can be done quite easily at any range, on any type of target and with varying equipment. It is a basic structure that guarantees your new shooter will gain the best introduction to shooting possible.

Finally, you may be a branch who would like me to bring a SSAA Try Shooting session to you. Contact me via aws@ssaa.org.au and we can certainly discuss the benefits and next steps.



Through the scope of a new shooter

Elise Cox

The opportunity to test drive my newly minted Firearms Licence was too good to miss. However, despite priding myself on being prepared, I faced the unknown when I ventured into the world of shooting.

A recent Ladies Try Shoot was the first time I stepped foot onto a range, loaded a magazine and discharged a firearm. I imagine it's easy for a more experienced shooter to forget how daunting that is. Starting out involves a steep learning curve, including becoming familiar with many rules, protocols, sights and sounds.

During my first month as a shooter, I had a number of preconceptions challenged and changed. First, that shooting could be dangerous. That idea went out the window within the first 10 minutes of my Safe Shooters Course. The course itself was my initial insight into SSAA and shooting in general.

The trainer was exceptionally generous and spent well over an hour answering every question. He ran through any doubtful

points as many times as it took for me to be clear. It became evident that he was more interested in me becoming a safe shooter than the small financial reward from running the course.

I am certainly more comfortable about shooting than I had been 90 days earlier. The regulations themselves offer a solid level of wellbeing, but what struck me was the safety-first mentality of every shooter that I encountered.

There were no cowboys at the range, no unsafe behaviour, no flouting of regulations, no disregard for Range Officers. In fact, what I noticed is shooters going above and beyond regulations to ensure safety. I also witnessed Range Managers vetting the requests of shooters for certain activities to ensure safety. It was clear that no exceptions were going to be made that would compromise safety.

The second preconception I had was that I may not be welcome. Why would a group of experienced shooters, at a busy range

with limited space, want to share the zone with a complete newcomer who couldn't load, didn't know how to adjust the scope and would simply take up the Range Officers' time?



Looking down Silverdale Rifle Range through Elise's new scope, a Zero Tech Vengeance 4.5-18x40.

Not only was I warmly welcomed but a group of 10 shooters had volunteered to spend their evening with myself and a group of other women. Instead of three hours of range time for themselves, they chose to share their knowledge and experience with us.

Actions speak louder than words and I cannot think of another organisation whose deeds are more congruent with their words than the SSAA. For those women who are considering shooting, I say this: I have found our fellow shooters to be extremely welcoming. I received more support from shooters than I have being inducted into new roles for employment.

There is a big difference between permitting/tolerating and encouraging. In terms of female participation in shooting, I've found ranges actively encourage and welcome female shooters.

There were a number of occasions where I could have been left to flounder. The first was when I struggled with the scope of a club firearm. The Range Officer could have left me struggling and shooting way off target, or adjusted the scope and moved on. However, he chose a third option. He demonstrated how to adjust the scope, and sight-in the rifle.

Another aspect was the consideration that the Range Manager gave to the little things. Knowing I was new to the range,

he kindly asked the Range Officer to support me, and assigned me a bench that was located away from other shooters. I didn't realise it at the time, but the Range Manager had thought ahead about

Not only was I warmly welcomed but a group of 10 shooters had volunteered to spend their evening with myself and a group of other women.

the number of times I would jump every time the Magnum at the other end of the range was discharged. Not only that, but he also set the rifle on the bench for me, since there was no way I could carry everything myself.

I was duly encouraged to come back. The Range Manager introduced me to the variety of targets and the fact that you don't always have to aim for the centre. I realised that you could have more fun with this sport than I expected. In each of these cases, someone went out of their way to make my day on the range better.

I have come to understand the importance of the regulations around the sport. This also extends to the procedures on the range. While I pride myself as being a safe shooter, I'm bound to make rookie mistakes concerning where to stand, and what I can and can't do when the range is open or closed. Still, Range Officers simply corrected my behaviour with understanding. Most importantly, they were actively watching and making sure I was always safe.

Now that I've broken a nail reloading my magazine, I'm starting to feel like a real shooter. Perhaps one day I'll be able to give back to another new shooter, but it will only be because of the support of my fellow shooters.



The first shot of a .308 was certainly an ear opening experience for Elise.

Shoot for a Cure NT 2021

Renee Barratt

This year saw our largest Ladies Only shooting event ever, with 250 tickets sold.

Shoot for a Cure NT (SFACNT) started back in 2013 with a 'small' event planned to attract more women to a male dominated sport. We had 97 women turn up and raised \$2500 for the McGrath Foundation. SFACNT has doubled over the past six years (no-one is counting 2020!), to the occasion now attracting well over 200 women and this year we raised \$25,000 for Ovarian Cancer Australia. Yes, you read that correctly, the comma is in the right spot – and yes, we counted the figures five times before we believed what our humble affair was capable of.

We had more than 60 volunteers helping to set up traps and targets, prepare food and maybe the most important job of the day – stock the bar (for those not participating in – and after – events). It's an amazing feat for our clubs (Top End Gun Club and Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia Darwin Branch Inc.), members and their friends and family. We were also lucky to have 11 Marines visiting the Robertson Barracks who volunteered their time and assisted with registration, clip refilling and learning the finer art to cooking snags and onions on the barbecue.

This was also our first event having our local archery club attend – Freds Pass Field Archers, and it was a fantastic addition to the day. The ladies loved the diversity of the three disciplines on offer and it's great to see friendly cooperation between local sporting clubs.

This year's happening had many 'regulars' return to shoot again and raise much needed funds for OCA, and we featured quite a few happy dances from attendees hitting their first clays or putting the hole in the right part of the target circle.

"This was my first year participating after watching from afar every year and I absolutely loved it. The coaches were amazing and the one-on-one aspect was such a nice welcome to sports I had always considered too hard to try," said attendee Laura Morgan.

"I had not done anything like this before, so was a complete beginner, however we all had such great fun and the coaches were very patient with us. I will definitely be attending next year," said fellow participant Jemma Killoran.

SFACNT wouldn't be possible without the amazing community support from Darwin businesses, our fantastic volunteer squad and the enthusiasm of our attendees – we look forward to running many more get-togethers in the years to come.



Join the Members enjoying these great membership benefits.

Today over 70,000 members have the protection of SSAA Firearms Insurance.

For only \$35 you get \$25,000 worth of Firearms Insurance. Your firearms and fixed accessories will be covered against loss, theft and damage at home and away within the policy conditions.

**Talk to the girls at SSAA Membership,
Call : (02) 8805 3900*
Email: megan@ssaains.com.au**



Before you renew any of your Insurance Policies talk to Megan at SSAA Insurance Brokers for an obligation FREE quote.



Megan can arrange coverage from Australia's leading insurance companies. She will give you professional advice, manage your claims and take care of all the details. So before you renew any policy talk to Megan, a trusted SSAA member working for you.

**Call : (08) 8332 0281*
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