WOMEN'S SHOOTER



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Editorial

Gemma Dunn

We wrap up the year in style to showcase Part 1 of our custombuilt AWS rifle with Beretta Australia. This Tikka .243 WIN



has been designed from the ground up to suit an intermediate level female shooter both at the range and to hunt with. While functionality is at the forefront of this build, it's also shaping up to be a thing of beauty.

The spotlight is shone on Matilda McGoon, a regional Victorian high school hospitality teacher who is also head of The Hamilton and Alexandra College sports shooting team.

And we look at the different situations that make up a memorable hunt. Whether it's for a trophy, meat, the testing pursuit itself or a mix of all of those things, certain moments can form a lasting impression.

We also extend handy advice from one novice shooter to another, which will provide a smoother and hopefully more economical introduction to our sport.

As an Olympian, Laetisha Scanlan covers how her training has advanced over the years as she ponders the question: How much training do you need?

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year as we look ahead to more great content in 2022.



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WOMEN'S SHOOTER

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Taking aim with Laetisha Scanlan

How much training do you need?

A common question I get asked is: How much training do you need to become an Olympian? I was once told it takes approximately 10,000 hours of deliberate practice to become a master or world-class level in any field. And while I'm not sold on this theory, I do know there are no shortcuts or fast-tracking answers. It can vary greatly depending on the individual and the sport.

No doubt, setting a fundamental base of correct technique at a young developmental age will help immensely but time and commitment also play pivotal roles. The younger you start at a sport, the more time you have to develop and hone your skills, which will set you on a great trajectory to success. That's not to say just because you start a sport at a later age, you'll never make it, but time does help.

When reflecting on my own training routines versus my Australian teammates, you would assume there would be a standardised system that flows throughout the squad. Surprisingly this is not the case, as being an individual

sport so many of us have completely different training regimes.

Training loads, training concepts and skill drills will all differ per the coach and individual plans. None of these opinions are more right or wrong than the next but it is fascinating how uniquely individualised our training paths are. Yet we all end up at the same destination – competing at an elite level.

At a grassroots stage the experience lies in the repetition of the act. This creates strong muscle memory, solid technique and the overall basics of the sport. As we progress out of beginner stage/repetition process, competition becomes the most effective way to fail, learn and succeed.

Competition environments are the benchmark to compare your ability, to grow and develop, while being an insightful tool to recognise your strengths and improve on your weaknesses. The purpose of meaningful training is to set a firm base for successful transferable results in competition.

Personally, in the first five years of my shooting,

I trained three-to-four days per week at the range, two days practice, two days competition. Now 16 years later, I train once, maybe twice a week.

I am yet to say I have mastered this sport, but I do believe my training has evolved at a similar rate to the growth and progression of my shooting ability. As I continue this sporting journey, I recognise I will forever be adapting my training environments to suit my needs. Currently, I've recognised I no longer need lots of quantity range sessions but rather small doses of purposeful training to keep me fresh, focused and looking ahead.

Your training can say a lot about you, so have a think about why you train. How do you feel after you train? Are you learning anything from your training? Do you feel burnt out before competing? Are you bored during your practice rounds? All these questions will give you great insight into what you need to be doing more, less or the same of.

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:

Ridgeline leggings & bag, Australian Women's Shooter, PO Box 2520, Unley, SA 5061

or online at ssaa.org.au/win

Competition closes December 31, 2021



Building your best with Beretta Australia

Part 1: The build

Gemma Dunn

Some time ago, Beretta Australia came to us with the idea to utilise their custombuild service and create what we think is the ideal rifle for an intermediate level female shooter who wants to use her rifle both at the range and to hunt.

You may recall from our article 'All about the fit' in Issue 2 of Australian Women's Shooter, I discuss that although it is important to have a firearm that suits the style of shooting you're going to do, it is nearly as important (if not more) as a female, to have one that fits you best. With this in mind, we wanted to build something with Beretta Australia that provided a good balance between form and fit from a female perspective.

You see, most off-the-shelf firearms are made to suit the frame of a male shooter. Although this is rapidly changing and more manufacturers are understanding the differences in, and catering for, the female frame it is still a good idea to consider having a firearm purpose-made just for you. Or at the very least with more adjustability than what an off-the-shelf product can offer.

Having adjustable/customisable features built into any firearm is becoming more desirable for households that tend to share their firearms between the two sexes. Why? Well, when we think about where females sit in the shooting sports

landscape in Australia, I reckon we can all agree that most of us ladies are introduced by a male relative, loved one or friend.

From there we tend to continue enjoying the sport alongside those who introduced us to the genre, and it is more common to have firearms with a shared use between the two. This is where fit can really become an issue and yet is forgotten about, particularly considering (generally speaking) the two parties are often quite different in frame and build.

So, with all of this in mind we will take you through the designing and selection process for our very own custom-made Australian Women's Shooter rifle.

The criteria

Our main criteria in building a rifle were that it needed to be reliable/ accurate, reasonably priced (for both gun and ammunition) and using a calibre that didn't kick too much at the range yet had enough of a punch for most east-coast Australian game. In addition to this, it obviously had to tick all the right boxes for fitting the female frame, with some adjustability, and good-looking to boot.

The first step to start our build was picking some good bones for our rifle, so we chose the Tikka T3x Varmint as our base-point. Undeniably, the Tikka T3 category is one of Australia's top selling rifles and has been for a long time now. It is well-known for its reliability and accuracy at an affordable price point, which ticked off our top two criterion for the build. It is important to point out that it isn't a requirement to have a Beretta Australia product to utilise their workshop and gunsmithing. They offer this service to any brand of firearm (be it a Ruger, Weatherby, Howa, Remington etc.) or product you might have.

From here, we had a tough time deciding (as many rifle shooters across the globe do) about what would make the most suitable calibre, for the everyday Aussie woman. That means one who wants to use her rifle for a bit of range time as well as a good general calibre for most Australian game. All the while remembering to try and keep recoil and weight at a reasonable level for both.

Obviously, bigger calibres are certainly suitable for larger Australian game, which us ladies can certainly handle. But with this rifle we are going for a bit more of a good all-rounder that can be shot comfortably for long periods of time at the range too, ruling out a large calibre.



A .243 WIN Tikka T3x Varmint met our top two criterion for the build.



Having adjustable/customisable features built into any firearm is becoming more desirable for households that tend to share their firearms between the two sexes.

On top of all this, we wanted to factor in the economics and ammunition supply of some calibres in Australia, coming to the decision that .243 WIN would suit best as a good all-rounder.

Once those basics were chosen, we began to move into the fun part of really customising our rifle. With the idea of this rifle being a good range and hunting hybrid, we chose a varmint barrel but had both the barrel and bolt fluted to reduce weight slightly to better suit females for field use. Not only does barrel fluting help with weight reduction, it also assists with faster cooling when at the range firing lots of shots. Oh, and I think it looks good too.





Once that was done, we moved onto choosing an appropriate stock for our rifle. The fact that it is a custom-built rifle meant the team at Beretta Australia would source and attach any aftermarket stock we liked, so we chose the At-One Adjustable Gunstock in nutmeg from Boyds.

It lets you adjust your gun in a way that provides a true custom fit and allows fine-tuning within varying shooting situations. Perfect for that target and hunting hybrid. This stock also lets you change the set-up to suit someone else in a matter of seconds using its push-button adjustment technology, lending itself perfectly to that couple who like to shoot together, perhaps a father/daughter duo or anyone wanting to share a rifle.

You basically gain two guns in one with this stock. For a better understanding of how this stock plays an important role for women compared to men – please refer to 'All about the fit' in Issue 2 at ssaa.org.au/women – downloadable free for members.

The stock is made from laminated hard-wood. All At-One stocks by Boyds are dried to exacting specifications to ensure rigidity and stability, then sealed with chemical-resistant finishes for long-lasting durability and performance in all weather conditions. Making it, once again, great for that hybrid use we are going for.

After selecting the stock, we wanted a different bolt handle aside from the factory option, one that would help keep overall weight down in the rifle while also making it easier to cycle while at the range. For these reasons we chose the Lumley Arms Tikka T3 Titanium and Carbon Fibre bolt handle, which is simplistic in its looks yet is a stronger, lighter and tougher bolt handle combo than usually found on a Tikka T3.

The handle and tactical knob combined weighs only 28 grams versus the factory steel unit at 41 grams. Most other comparable aftermarket options are well over 70-plus grams.

You might be reading this and thinking 'surely

a few grams here and there don't really matter' but we think every bit of weight that can be managed with a hybrid-style rifle such as this one, counts.

This handle is also oversized, which provides a larger surface area to grab. More leverage means it's easier to action (requires less force) and reduces the amount of hand movement between the trigger and the bolt, making the overall shooting and cycling action much smoother. The downside to having an oversized bolt handle is that it can sometimes dig into your back if the rifle is slung over your shoulder in the

field. It's important to note this and ensure you sling your rifle with the bolt handle away from the body.

The Lumley Arms
Carbon Fibre oversized bolt
handle provides a lightweight easy to
use aftermarket option. The machining
of the fluted bolt is for further weight
reduction and matches the fluted barrels.



Eventually it came time to select what scope we wanted as the crowning glory of our new rifle. Again, we needed to stick to something that lends itself well to both target shooting and hunting so we chose the Signature HD 5-25x50mm by Burris.

This is because it is lightweight yet has the magnification range and internal adjustment that is suitable for game commonly shot with a .243 WIN.

Thanks to the 30mm tube and the scope's internal elevation span, it also gives the ability to shoot longer distances at the range. We then chose high-quality Steiner alloy rings and a Picatinny rail for mounting the scope.

To finish off, we had the option of Cerakoting our rifle. Cerakote is a ceramic product that is sprayed then baked on to various substances such as metal, wood and plastic. It offers protection against all sorts of things like rust, petrol, paint stripper and even some acids. It does not need constant oiling and is tough against knocks and drops in the field.

Because of these benefits, it is becoming more desirable for hunting rifles. Cerakote also comes in a wide variety of colours and to be honest, it was tough picking a combination that would look good with the Boyds stock but we got there eventually and it should look impressive. After all, who doesn't want a good-looking gun to use?

We are yet to receive the rifle due to COVID lockdowns so stay tuned for Part 2 in a future edition of Australian Women's Shooter. We'll be able to show you the finished product, putting our custom-build through its paces at the SSAA range and in the field.



Rachael Oxborrow

A Victorian high school teacher is using the skills gained in clay target shooting to help her students achieve academically.

Matilda McGoon heads up The Hamilton and Alexandra College shooting team and believes the mental clarity and control many wouldn't realise is learned through competition target shooting is giving her students valuable life skills and job opportunities.

"I have a passion for encouraging the students to obtain something greater," she said.

"You can see them change as people throughout the program as they realise there is more to shooting than the pest control they're helping with on the property at home. "The life skills they gain are so valuable, the control they need over their emotions to grow into young adults can be learned through shooting.

"I see this as being particularly relevant for the boys who are at a time in their life when emotions can be hard to overcome, so this is giving them better coping mechanisms.

"We see it translate to their studies, their attitudes to tough situations and even their career choices."

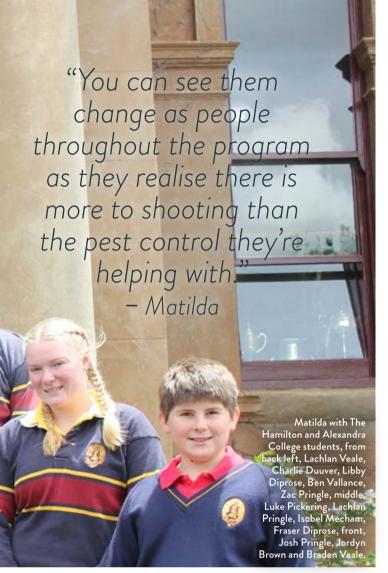
The hospitality teacher fell into the role of shooting team captain two years ago when she became the only staff member at the school with a current Firearms Licence.

As a rural property owner, Matilda holds a licence but isn't personally a target

shooter. However, this hasn't stopped her from taking the role to a new level. Recently Gemma Dunn, the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia's Coaching and Membership Development Manager, organised to have Olympian Suzy Balogh join her in their class via Zoom. This session discussed the pathway to the Olympics, how best to prepare for competition and juggle education, life and shooting competitively. It would have been in person but unfortunately COVID-19 restrictions were in place. The group has also had firearm safety and coaching and shooting technique training sessions.

"Having Suzy Balogh speak to us was amazing," Matilda said.

"It was just inspiring for these kids to hear from an Olympic shooter and see where shooting can take you.





Above and below: SSAA National Coaching and Membership Development Manager Gemma Dunn is passionate about working with school aged children to learn about the shooting sports.



"They watch the swimming and track and so on and don't realise that shooting can be an Olympic sport.

"Now they can see how target shooting could go further than just shooting at home in the paddock."

Over time, Matilda said she can see her students grow, adapt and translate their skills to the classroom.

"It ends the common excuses about why something isn't going their way, it makes them think about what didn't work and how they can do better next time," she said.

"They're using their shooting skills to get better life skills and grades."

The Hamilton and Alexandra College has about 50 students taking part in the

shooting program this year and combines with several other local schools to shoot at the SSAA Hamilton Branch with the support of local SSAA members.

Matilda said the focus on safety was also an important aspect of the program, particularly as her students were using firearms at home.

"We focus on treating our firearms with respect, shooting at appropriate targets and taking note of our surroundings," she said.

"The reality is firearms handling is a necessity for their lives out here on properties and we're working towards making sure these students are safe and educated and doing the right thing."



Gemma has worked with a number of regional schools. Pictured here with student Arwen Porter from Trinity Anglican College at the SSAA Wodonga Range.

From one novice shooter to another

Elise Cox

As a novice, I rely on the guidance of experienced shooters. I never grew up around shooting, so the entire entity is new to me.

In general, it seems there is a reluctance to talk openly about shooting. However, since becoming a shooter myself it is amazing how many people around me have been shooters for years – I just never knew. I work with a large number of clients from across a wide array of industries and it was only recently when I was told by a client that they would have to call me back as they were busy heading to 'Nationals'. When I asked them what sport, I was surprised and delighted to hear they were competing in long-distance shooting.

I have met some exceptional shooters who were generous in sharing their tips, while other lessons I have learned the hard way. Here's a collection of some of the tips I wish I knew earlier.

Electronic hearing protection

I will admit the sound of Magnums, .308s and .338s wasn't something I was used to. I would jump out of my skin every time a round broke the silence. It took about four visits to the SSAA range before becoming comfortable with the sound and I stopped jumping.

I was only using standard, run of the mill disposable earplugs – and this was a mistake. It affected my ability to hear the Range Officers, announcements and my fellow shooters. They also seemed to do little to truly dampen the sound. Thankfully, the Range Officer introduced me to electronic hearing protection.

For those who haven't yet bought themselves a pair, please do. Unlike traditional hearing protection which simply deadens sounds, electronic hearing protection reacts quickly to cut out noises above 85 dB (varies) while amplifying ambient sound – like your shooting buddy or Range Officers.

But be warned – it also means you can potentially hear what's being said by those who assume they are having a private conversation six benches down. So take note and never make fun of another shooter for having to pack up early because they didn't bring enough ammunition, or they will probably hear you.

Selecting a rifle based on size

Obtaining your first 'Permit to Acquire' is exciting. You probably already have an idea of what rifle you would like to purchase and no doubt everyone has

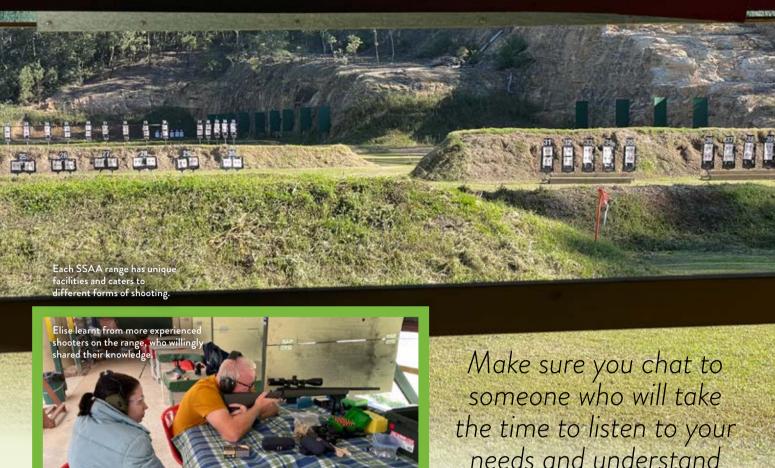
offered their opinions as well. At the end of the day the best advice I think I ever received was: "It doesn't matter what you want, you need to go to a good gunstore and hold the rifle. It has to be selected based on the purpose you wish to use it for and be the right size."

My criteria was a smooth bolt, a reputable brand that wasn't going to have me running to a gunsmith or fishing out jammed rounds every five minutes, and good for target shooting at 50m. That's it...

For many reasons, I was determined to go for a Lithgow LA 101. I was sentimentally attached to it and it was in the right calibre, and at the correct price point. However, when the time came, there was no denying that it was simply too long, too heavy and not the right rifle for my size.

After looking at a number of rifles, it was actually the Tikka T1x that was the best fit. Not only that, but the 16" barrel option. It was well worth having the right advice.





So, make sure you chat to someone who will take the time to listen to your needs and understand exactly how you'll be using your rifle. That way you'll find the right rifle, first time. Keep in mind that once you get a rifle it doesn't stop there. I had my trigger lightened up and my scope set up before sighting it in at the range.

The right rifle for the range

I selected a .22 calibre as it was going to offer me the most economical days shooting at the range. I would also be able to shoot for sustained periods without needing to cool the barrel down or ice my shoulder.

I certainly didn't need the larger calibres required for hunting or distance shooting. Make sure you think through what you seek and communicate that to the team at your local gunshop. It's great to have an idea of what you want and to have done

your research – but you may find their advice invaluable if you're a novice shooter like me. I also understand now why I also received the advice to "buy a bigger gun safe than you need."

Now that I understand the significant variations in requirements depending on whether you are target shooting at 300m, hunting deer, participating in competitive shooting, or operating as a professional shooter, you may certainly need more than one rifle. And a bigger gun safe is a good idea. I've learned that with just one rifle stored.

Different range different rules

Once you have the right rifle, the fun part is finding out where you can shoot it. The Facebook groups of each SSAA range are filled with questions about what calibres can be shot, where and when. Not each range accepts rifles above

.22 calibre, shooting standing and high velocity ammunition.

exactly how you'll be

using your rifle.

The Range Officers have always seemed happy to help out, even selling subsonic ammunition when my standard ammunition was not permitted due to the more residential location than my local range. Operating hours may also differ, including regular dates where the ranges may be closed for maintenance.

I've found that the common rules about permitted activities upon range opening and closing remain true, but it is best to confirm. And to those who would like to bring an unlicensed friend or family member under a P650 form in NSW, not all ranges currently facilitate the P650 so please consult with your Range Officer.

While we're talking about the range, make yourself comfortable. An adjustable stool and a picnic blanket to cover the bench makes for a relaxed day's shooting.

Testing ammunition

In my previous article (Issue 12), I discussed the differences I found between Federal and Winchester ammunition. I've since learned a valuable lesson – ignore the first five or so shots if shooting subsonic rimfire ammunition. My rifle didn't 'spit out' the Winchester – it was just used to the Federal which I had shot first and I simply needed to keep firing a few more rounds.

According to my sources, the coatings used differ between brands, so it can take a number of shots before the rifle is 'acclimatised' to the particular brand. Upon returning to the range for my second shoot with the Tikka T1x, I've found little difference between the accuracy of Federal and Winchester ammunition. This is not needed for rimfire ammunition that isn't subsonic as the projectile will have a copper coating instead of the wax or oil found on subsonic rimfire ammunition.

This is great news as I can now shoot my remaining Winchester rounds with confidence. I'm glad that I gave each brand a second go. I would encourage any new shooter going through the process of choosing the right ammunition for their rifle to give each brand a fair number of shots, after disregarding the accuracy of their first few rounds. Repeat for each brand tested.

Locking an ammo tin

I ended up with a plastic ammunition box by accident. In my haste to purchase some rounds, I completely forgot that I should have bought a locked box. I had no choice but to grab a basic, plastic ammunition box from the gunshop on my way out.

To be honest, it was an overpriced lockable tackle box that I could have picked up anywhere and didn't seem to offer much actual protection from being forced open. A few weeks later I went to the local army disposals and found what I was really after – an army surplus, lockable ammo tin.

This strong metal box offers a much greater level of security. There is one drawback of the army ammo tins – they don't lock easily with a standard padlock. I'm embarrassed to admit but I had to venture onto YouTube to find out how to safely lock it.

There are a number of suggestions, but most involved drilling a large hole through the ammo can's metal exterior/lid. There is a better way though and it turns out the secret is a cable lock. The other alternative is a long shackle padlock. For me, the cable lock offered the convenience of a combination lock so no more having to hide keys.

Just be sure to reset the combination when you purchase the cable lock. When closing the ammo tin, don't shut it all the way. Tuck the flap of the top lid under the wire handle at the bottom and use the cable lock to secure them. They will protrude out, but short of drilling holes this is the most convenient way to lock the ammo tin and meet safe storage requirements.

...give each brand a fair number of shots, after disregarding the accuracy of their first few rounds.



BYO targets

The SSAA targets are great but they are designed for a specific purpose and may not offer the number of small marks you need. When I was sighting in and trialling different brands of ammunition, I needed a large number of tiny targets where I could test my groupings.

The standard targets really didn't provide many options for this although the small SSAA logo at the bottom was a frequently 'targeted' area given its convenient size. I was introduced by a fellow shooter to a range of fluorescent, splatter burst, stick-on targets that have certainly increased the amount of rounds I can shoot before a target change. They effectively switch colour to clearly mark every shot and can offer a large number of targets to a sheet that's about A4 sized.

Of course, you will need to set them up so my tip is to arrive early, or staple the sheet to your area once the range closes for target change. You can also peel and stick them over the existing SSAA targets. With some of the smaller 'target' dots there will be plenty of opportunities to test your skills. It is important to note however, that not all SSAA ranges allow the use of non-approved SSAA targets so it's always best to check beforehand.

They are inexpensive but offer a large number of targets on a compact sheet so you can shoot for an extended period of time. Particularly if you are sighting in, testing grain weights, trialling new brands of ammunition or just want to shoot for longer, it's worth taking a set next time you head to the range. I've also found the high visibility of the fluorescent colour makes it easier to spot your own target.



Self adhesive splatter targets offer a large number of targets to aim at in a small area.



It's reasonable to assume that the more expensive hunts for unfamiliar game, resulting in an attractive trophy to put on your wall, would be the most fulfilling.

However, this is often not the case. Take for example, the bovines such as water and Cape buffaloes, bison, bantengs and scrub bulls which I occasionally hunt. By far my most fulfilling bovine hunt was when I was alone hunting scrub steers in thick bush with my .338 Win Mag.

Some steers had become feral and neither dogs nor skilled stockmen/women could round them up or turn them. They would head straight for the dense bush as soon as they saw or smelt a human. What was worse was that they would take other cattle with them and they too would become feral.

I hunted one steer slowly through the heavy vegetation for four hours and he would just stay ahead of me (out of sight), but I could hear the twigs cracking, and kept following the fresh spoor until he was cornered at the end of a gully with boulders and cliffs on three sides... and then I shot him.

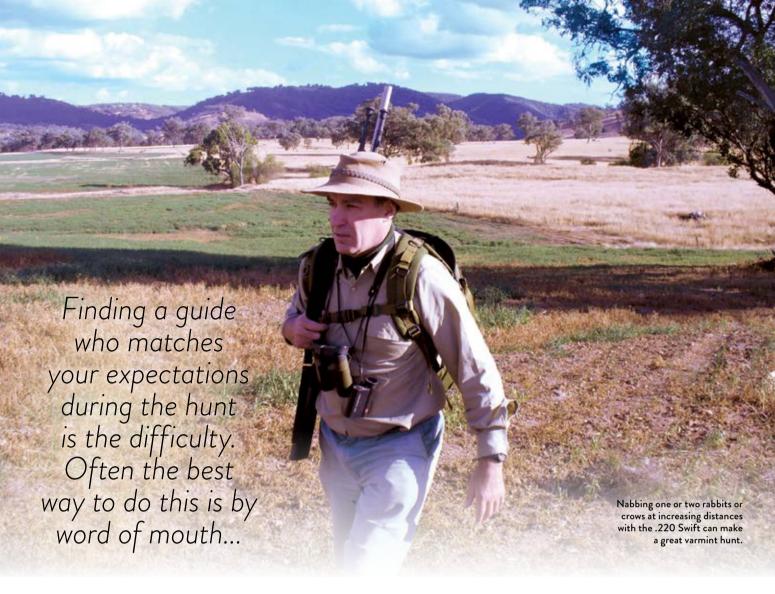
Woodsman, adventurer, hunter and writer Colonel Townsend Whelen was a strong advocate of doing the entire hunt yourself because of all the skills you acquire and learn along the way.

There were no big horns and I didn't even bother packing a camera, just some bags and large knives to take as much meat back as I could carry with me each trip. I had four hours of complete exhilaration. Also, I did it all myself and that adds significantly to the satisfaction.

Woodsman, adventurer, hunter and writer Colonel Townsend Whelen was a strong advocate of doing the entire hunt yourself because of all the skills you acquire and learn along the way. He said that you may go with an outfitter for a few hunts to learn what to do, but after that, you should do it yourself. However, in modern times, many animals are not able to be hunted unless accompanied by a guide. A lot of

hunts in unfamiliar places would not be successful without a guide's knowledge.

Sometimes an otherwise average hunt can become exceptional by what happens in a short period of time. A rusa stag that bolted across my path and hid in some timber two-thirds the way up a hill required a cross-gully shot after climbing up to his level on an adjacent hill. After spotting him through the binoculars, he laid down in the timber for about 20 minutes. Eventually he stood up and presented a small area of his shoulder, which was not obstructed by tree trunks or branches, in which to shoot him. The shot was good at 247m and he just dropped on the spot. The shot ensured one of my most memorable deer hunts.



A spectacular kill such as when varmints catapult into the air when using my .220 Swift, or the speed at which a buffalo crashes to the ground when a 500-grain Woodleigh breaks its neck are events that make a noteworthy pursuit.

With varmint hunting, I remember one gully that would usually yield a few rabbits. Once, before the bunnies were wiped out by myxomatosis in that area, it was overrun by them. The fun was shooting as many as possible with the 10-round magazine in the .22LR before quickly changing the magazine and putting the standard 5-round clip in to secure any stragglers.

At other locations using the .220 Swift from a rest, the challenge is not to bag as many rabbits or crows as possible, but to shoot them further than what I had previously shot them. If I manage one or two at more than 400m it is a great varmint hunt.

With many of the bigger game that you are required to use a guide for, either because of legal requirements or because you just can't gain access to them unless you go on a guided hunt, the way the guide controls things will often determine how enjoyable the outing is.

I once asked a reputable New Zealand hunting guide why he didn't allow his clients to choose where and how they would hunt each day. His reply was that his livelihood depends upon his reputation for successfully locating the good quality game for his clients. If he were to allow his clients to make such decisions, his success rate wouldn't be nearly as high and so his reputation and number of clients would diminish.

It is true that some guides will do almost the entire hunt for you and all you have to do is follow them and hold the rifle correctly pointed at the game and squeeze the trigger. Other guides, if they believe that you are capable, tend to give the client more of an experience. There are some clients who actually prefer to just go along and simply do the successful shot and have a fine trophy.

Finding a guide who matches your expectations during the hunt is the difficulty. Often the best way to do this is by word of mouth, asking others who have hunted with that guide how the hunt is conducted. Sometimes it's just a matter of trial and error – when you find a guide who suits, if they do other species that interest you, choose them again. The one thing I've found is that what is said before you place your deposit down on the hunt isn't always a reliable indicator of how the hunt will actually be.

Trophy size is not necessarily a good indication of how rewarding a hunt is, nor its degree of difficulty. With deer trophies, often the best heads are not free-range where the animals can cross into adjoining

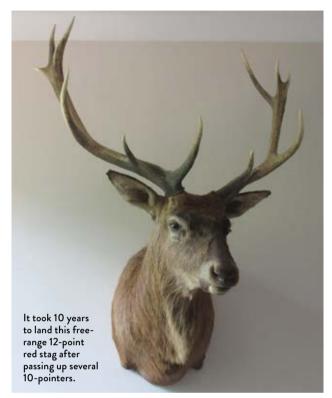
properties or reserves. It took me 10 years to take a 12-point red stag that was free-range, after passing up several 10-pointers, bagging one in southern New South Wales.

Yet on some estates with high fences, a 'better' trophy with more points and mass could be obtained in a much shorter period. Sometimes a 'mediocre' head, depending on the conditions of how it was secured, such as on a do-it-yourself hunt, is a very worthy trophy.

I like to take my own rifle and ammunition on hunts whenever feasible. Besides having familiarity with your own rifle, I have seen several instances where camp guns weren't zeroed correctly despite assurances to the contrary. Putting a few shots through the rifle to check the zero is mandatory, but this

still doesn't give complete familiarity. However, for many, the hassle of taking a rifle overseas for some hunts is not worth it. I derive more satisfaction using my own equipment.

Sometimes hunting in a challenging environment can make the assignment satisfying. This may be because you are high in the mountains, in the desert, or in freezing conditions in the snow. Often you



enjoy such a hunt more well after you do it, rather than when actually doing it.

Frequently, being in a significantly different culture and experiencing how things, including the hunt, are done in that

background can make the hunt wonderful. Probably my most enjoyable overseas trek was for Coues deer in Sonora, Mexico (see Australian Hunter magazine, Edition 68). The food, the vaqueros on horseback,

the Mexican culture, the Spanish language, the spiky vegetation, the long rows of venison jerky hanging on the clothesline all made it absolutely fantastic. Hopefully, I'll be able to hunt again in Mexico in the rainforest area to the south for the elusive brocket deer or even a desert mule deer in the north.

A meat hunt can be just as rewarding as a mission for antlers or horns. Probably a good way to do this for certain deer species that are expensive to hunt, is to go after a buck with good antlers when you first target that species and after securing that, go after meat (often a doe) on future unguided hunts. Alternatively, the best time of the year, which is often around the rut, is the point to go after a worthy set of antlers, while other periods are better for meat hunts.

Some hunters like fine cuisine, good service and interesting conversation at the end of the hunting day. Many African safaris provide this and some North American and European hunts. I usually like to have several meals of the game that I hunted. This to me, completes the hunting experience. If the meat isn't ready to eat from what I have shot, then the same species that a previous hunter has shot will suffice.

Many hunts just happen without you having planned them that way, but often if you determine what you really like and make the correct enquiries beforehand, you can increase your chances of a great hunt significantly. With hunting, you can't always take the game you go after on each hunt, but that is one of the things that makes it interesting, and more rewarding when you are successful.





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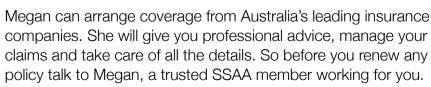




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