

Father & daughter road trip • Guidance to progress your shooting • Hunting & fishing as a family

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S SHOOTER



New mum Michelle finds
comfort in returning to
*nature and feral
pest control*

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Editorial

Gemma Dunn



Laetisha Scanlan talks about the technique where Trap shooters count the clays when competing and whether she finds it a help or a hindrance.

A loving mum discusses life after giving birth to her beautiful daughter and how getting back to nature and the management of feral pests has helped her through some of the struggles that can come with new motherhood.

We hit the open road on a father and daughter trip like no other to remote Coober Pedy where a variety of exciting comps at SSAA ranges provide outstanding results and everlasting memories.

I encouragingly delve into performance plateaus in your shooting and help guide you through this natural occurrence that can be overcome with practice and persistence.

And we feature a long-time married couple who love nothing more than hunting and fishing together, which has proven a real treat when the adventure includes the whole family.

Gemma

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AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S SHOOTER

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Taking aim with Laetisha Scanlan

Trap counts – game changer or an unwanted distraction?

Now, I'm sure you've heard of gamblers counting cards at casinos to increase their likelihood of scooping the pot. But did you know that when the chips are down many international shooters in the Olympic Trap discipline count targets? And because of this trick, if done successfully, they will know the direction of (at least) their last five targets in their round, even potentially more depending on the sequence.

In Olympic Trap we have nine different programs, with diverse heights and angled targets. But with every 25-target round (although the sequence may vary) what remains definite is the fact you are guaranteed to get two left targets, two right targets and one straight away target from every single station.

And because of this there is a shrewd mathematical way to figure out the

direction of your last 5-10 targets depending on your individual sequence. The telling gain is that you have a better chance of hitting something if you already know the direction that it's going. Counting can also be great for people with overactive thought patterns during competition. It can be a positive distraction to the individual if mastered correctly.

The concentration of counting/remembering allows for little or no other thoughts to enter your head, silencing any untoward or performance deterring thinking processes. This makes your task at hand easier to focus on and potentially gives you an edge on your competitors. The real benefit of counting targets comes in finals situations when you only have one shot to rely on.

I was taught the technique of counting targets during one of our many Melbourne

lockdowns and persisted with it for a couple of months on the range until I found that it was becoming more of a hindrance than a help.

For me personally, I was putting all my effort into the equation of remembering what targets I had shot and as a result was faulting on my fundamentals and pre-shot routine. It was then that I decided my more organic way of shooting was the path I needed to take.

However, in saying this, I have known several successful shooters/coaches who encourage and use counting every time they are on the range. Target counting for the right individual can be a huge competitive advantage but again it comes down to personal preference and what works best for you.



Letter to the Editor

Hi Gemma,
I just read your article in issue 15 and it really spoke to me, as I too was asking this very question - rimfire or centrefire for my first rifle purchase?

I went to my two local gunshops and spoke with them. I have friends who have a farm on the Tablelands, they have the odd rabbit, a wild dog problem and some feral pigs. I decided I wanted a .22 to begin with, so I held them all at both shops. Both of them had a CZ 457 .22LR American in beech and it was my favourite above all others. I went home and did some research on the rifle and went back to the second shop, where the owner had been more helpful, and made the purchase. He even did me a good deal on the rifle and a scope too, which was even better!

I'm currently in the waiting period for my permit, so I'm counting down the days until I can pick it up. I'm eager to learn with this one and ace the target practice before moving on to bunnies.

When I am fully confident, I will go back there and look for something more powerful for the dogs and pigs. I was thinking of a .308. Do you think this would be too much of a jump for a newbie with only .22 practice?

Once I pick up my rifle, I am going to take it to a SSAA Queensland range for some practice. Thanks for the article, it's nice to feel included as a newbie. More articles with tips like this for us newbies are appreciated.

Cheers, Amanda

Hi Amanda,
Thanks very much for getting in touch about our article and your similar experiences! I love to hear stories from new shooters such as yourself and how our articles can help you along the way - that's the WHOLE point of the mag. You have certainly made a fantastic purchase with your CZ American. It is a great rifle and a personal favourite of mine.

I think you will get immense enjoyment out of it for many years to come. It's also equally as important to know that you have someone in a local store that you find helpful and can trust. This is very crucial in our world - especially when you are new. In terms of jumping up to a .308, it is a considerable step. And it is definitely one you'd want to do once you are fully confident in the processes of shooting. Maybe hold off until you get to that point and then we can chat further about the next steps for you.

The best approach is to always ensure you keep safety in mind with commonsense in everything you do. I will contact some friends at SSAA Queensland to see if they know of anyone that might be able to help you get on your feet at your local range, and let you know. In the meantime, always feel free to give me a call or shoot me an email with any questions. I'd be happy to help you as much as I can from a distance. Cheers, Gemma

Hunters for life

A photograph of a hunter in a field with a deer in the background. The hunter is wearing a dark jacket and is standing in a field of tall grass and shrubs. A deer is visible in the background, standing in a field of tall grass and shrubs. The background shows a line of trees under a cloudy sky.

Wayne Kampe and family enjoy the adventure of hunting and fishing

Fate brought my wife Denise and I together over two-and-a-half decades ago. We were single parents with two youngsters apiece. Life is full of surprises and a memorable one was to discover that we both enjoyed a hunting and fishing upbringing.

My wife-to-be liked shooting and camping – how good! Hardly surprising, it was not long before we took the pre-teen kids off for some long weekends of hunting rabbits and camping to kick-start a lifestyle where they also developed an enduring love of outdoors life.

The early days

During those early hunting trips, the youngsters adored sleeping under a tarp, stalking game, and enjoying a campfire where scones on sticks, marshmallows and

cooking a rabbit on the coals were all great fun. Denise and I, in turn, relished the opportunities to teach our children how to stalk and shoot rabbits with a .22 rimfire, with foxes sometimes nailed as a bonus.

Archery also came into vogue and bowhunting equipment started to find a place in the car alongside fishing gear. With rabbits and goats the mainstay of our hunts back in the day it was natural that game meat was always being prepared in the Kampe kitchen.

Here and now

With the passing of the years and many memorable excursions where hunting combined seamlessly with freshwater fishing, the youngsters fledged and flew the nest, so to speak, although camping is still a favoured activity.

Since exiting the workforce Denise and I have taken every opportunity to hunt, although it's the well directed arrow that harvests our furred game these days.

For the record, we are no longer as fit and agile as we once were. But make no mistake – we are both still mighty grateful to be able to enjoy our hunting and fishing in a manner we choose to.

The transition from rifle to bow

For the Kampe hunting team it was not quite a full transition from hunting with rifles to full-time bowhunting. Landowners liked the bows, being both silent and short-range instruments, and while rabbits and foxes were easy marks when bowhunting we stayed with the centrefire rifle for our deer hunting.

Camping out was an experience etched in memory forever. Imagine waking before dawn to hear stags – both near and far – going right off.

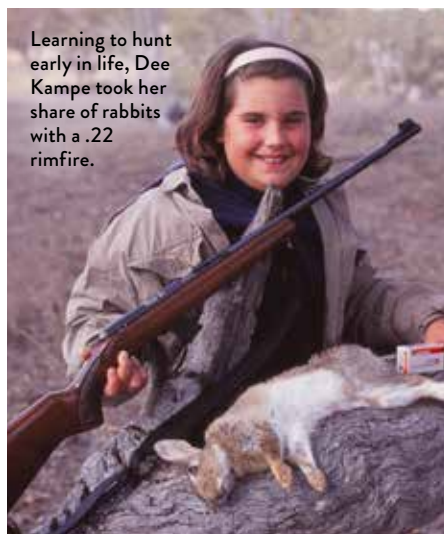
Some excellent fallow doe calls brought this stag within bow range. However, he was passed up due to an inferior head.

We had not long gained access to deer range and deer stalking was a whole new ball game.

This eventually saw Denise and I taking representative red deer trophy heads with the Ruger .308 and enjoying some mighty fine venison meals along the way. Yearlings made great table fare and we also ate any stags taken because we don't waste game meat. We kill it, we eat it. That's the creed.

With a 6x5 red stag for Denise, a 5x5 for myself and limited opportunities to upgrade our trophies over the next few years, we started to speculate that some of the stags we were passing up at 100m would be real achievements if taken with an arrow at 40m. As I was to learn, so would any deer for that matter.

With the fateful decision to bowhunt deer, we then had to work hard on stalking tactics. Dressing in best camouflage, walking silently, reading the wind and exuding patience overall led to a better understanding of deer behaviour. The main issue was always in closing that gap but little by little the tactics evolved to a useful level, although I will admit we learned mainly from mistakes.



Learning to hunt early in life, Dee Kampe took her share of rabbits with a .22 rimfire.



When rabbits were plentiful, so were foxes. Scott arrowed one that came to the whistle.



A pig taken by bow and arrow in the early days.



Denise skinning a doe to retrieve fresh, tasty venison.



A long time ago when a team effort involving doe calls and some great archery saw Denise tag this stag.

Camping rough half the fun

Those early days of bowhunting red deer saw us strategically refining tactics to gain some advantage during the roar. While we preferred to camp on the creek, the deer lived up in the ranges of Brisbane Valley, so to avoid wasting time climbing hills at first light, we decided to camp up range with them.

We would take up two backpacks apiece – with one front, one rear – plus the bows and arrows and enough gear for a few nights out. Sometimes my son Scott would accompany us, sharing the backpacking fun. Scouting earlier, I had planted water in chosen areas so packets of biscuits, buttered bread, tins of tuna and instant noodles were our tucker for the camps.

At night we would set up the tiny tent on flat ground and when Scott came with us, we all, amusingly, had to face in the same direction to sleep. The mattress? Simply some piled-up lantana and grass under the floor of the tent. It smelled okay but was a little hard on the back. Denise and I were younger then, in our 50s, so it did not matter much.

Camping out was an experience etched in memory forever. Imagine waking before dawn to hear stags – both near and far – going right off. We would have a tiny fire going, drink fruit juice and eat cereal out of a plastic bag with a spoon while an emptied peach tin served as a billy to make our coffee. Waiting for the water to boil, each bellow and ongoing blush of dawn would remind us just how privileged we were to be there.

A red stag for Denise

Denise's first bow trophy stands out. During a Kampe campout a stag had kept Denise and I awake half the night. He was close, very vocal and clearly not in a hurry to go anywhere else. All three aspects were hardly conducive to grabbing much sleep. With a hurried cuppa and a Scotch Finger biscuit for brekky, we tucked the camo gear in, pulled up the face masks then slowly and cautiously moved forward to see if we could locate Mr Noisy.

When he obligingly roared again, we picked up moving antlers in the binoculars to see him bedded down about 80m away on the side of the heavily timbered ridge. The breeze was definitely in our favour but a group of pretty-faced wallabies between the stag and us were certain sentries should we move forward.



Taken 28 years ago with the .308, Denise's 5x6 red stag trophy head.

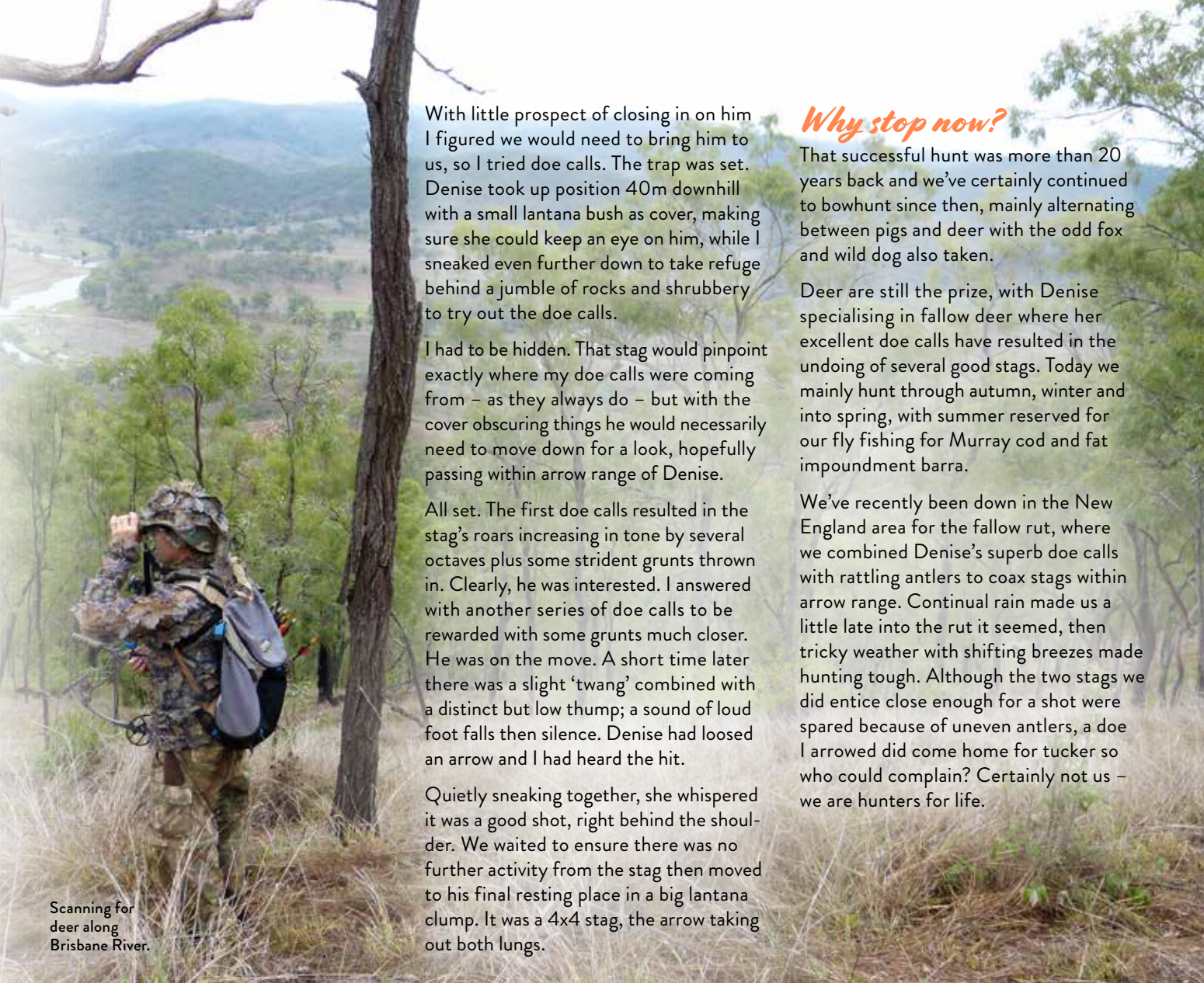
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With little prospect of closing in on him I figured we would need to bring him to us, so I tried doe calls. The trap was set. Denise took up position 40m downhill with a small lantana bush as cover, making sure she could keep an eye on him, while I sneaked even further down to take refuge behind a jumble of rocks and shrubbery to try out the doe calls.

I had to be hidden. That stag would pinpoint exactly where my doe calls were coming from – as they always do – but with the cover obscuring things he would necessarily need to move down for a look, hopefully passing within arrow range of Denise.

All set. The first doe calls resulted in the stag's roars increasing in tone by several octaves plus some strident grunts thrown in. Clearly, he was interested. I answered with another series of doe calls to be rewarded with some grunts much closer. He was on the move. A short time later there was a slight 'twang' combined with a distinct but low thump; a sound of loud foot falls then silence. Denise had loosed an arrow and I had heard the hit.

Quietly sneaking together, she whispered it was a good shot, right behind the shoulder. We waited to ensure there was no further activity from the stag then moved to his final resting place in a big lantana clump. It was a 4x4 stag, the arrow taking out both lungs.

Why stop now?

That successful hunt was more than 20 years back and we've certainly continued to bowhunt since then, mainly alternating between pigs and deer with the odd fox and wild dog also taken.

Deer are still the prize, with Denise specialising in fallow deer where her excellent doe calls have resulted in the undoing of several good stags. Today we mainly hunt through autumn, winter and into spring, with summer reserved for our fly fishing for Murray cod and fat impoundment barra.

We've recently been down in the New England area for the fallow rut, where we combined Denise's superb doe calls with rattling antlers to coax stags within arrow range. Continual rain made us a little late into the rut it seemed, then tricky weather with shifting breezes made hunting tough. Although the two stags we did entice close enough for a shot were spared because of uneven antlers, a doe I arrowed did come home for tucker so who could complain? Certainly not us – we are hunters for life.

Scanning for deer along Brisbane River.

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:

**ZeroFit Ultimate Top,
Australian Women's Shooter,
PO Box 2520, Unley, SA 5061**

or online at ssaa.org.au/win

Competition closes September 30, 2022



WIN a ZeroFit Heatrub Ultimate Unisex Top

**Please provide your desired size (S - XL) upon entry*

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It's not all sunshine, lollipops and rainbows

New mum **Michelle Pares** finds solace in returning to the great outdoors and feral pest management

I am an active member of SSAA Conservation and Wildlife Management (CWM) and absolutely love the outdoors. In my spare time before becoming a mum, I would help out at a family farm around the corner from my Queensland home where my two cows Winston and Peacey reside, along with 70 other head of cattle.

The 460-acre property is surrounded by flowing creeks, other large estates and offset projects. This is my happy place; I love nothing more than to snuggle up with my cows during the day while they nap and chew their cud.

I became interested in feral pest control and helping at the farm to keep myself occupied while my husband works away. I thoroughly enjoy participating in various feral control programs with CWM and this gave me plenty of opportunities to engage in projects all over Queensland and learn new skills with likeminded people.

Knowing I have found my place doing what I love gives me a great sense of self pride and respect. Last year I gave birth to a beautiful girl named Addison. It seemed my previous life of freedom, the outdoors and hunting might have come to an abrupt stop.

I'm going to be completely honest – having a baby is not all sunshine, lollipops and rainbows. Some days feel like your soul is being sucked right out of you.

Finding that routine in the early days, being a tired mess, and craving the life once known, became my daily experience.

Most mornings as the sun was coming up, I would find myself walking Addison around the backyard soothing her to sleep. Even though at such a young age she could barely recognise my face, I would still find her looking around at the trees moving in the breeze and noticing the birds chirping. She seemed to be at peace outside. Much like her mum, being stuck inside the house for too long, just sent us both crazy.

My husband is in a fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) position with work, so having a week by ourselves gave us time to begin a new life together. It was important for my own mental health to try as much as possible to keep my routine. After the morning chores pre-baby, I would normally run or walk to work, so trying to keep as normal as possible, once I became a mum, I would load Addison up in the pram and off we would go. Sometimes it would be at 5am and sometimes 8am, but I tried my best to be outdoors during a safe UV time.

We would walk down to the farm to greet our beloved pet cows Winston and Peacey. It was calving season and seeing all the other cows with feeding calves, I could sympathise with them having their udders pulled and butted. I reassured them it would not last forever!



Mum Michelle and daughter Addison make a great team.

After getting through the difficult and tiring first three months, little smiles started to show, eye contact became more direct and Addison's personality began to shine. She would love to sit in the baby carrier and be given a walk around the paddocks in the early morning and late afternoon during golden hour, which in the past I knew as the best time to hunt.

But now as a mother of an infant I know it as witching hour. Having a baby didn't mean I had a life sentence. I found my mental health restored once returning home from the farm, being outside and having sunshine on my face. It felt like I could breathe again. Being active, feeling a sense of belonging and having a purpose in life are all good for emotional health and wellbeing. I was able to feel happier and better able to deal with problems and stress.

A nearby chook prompts a glorious grin.



Michelle is happiest when outdoors.

Self-care is anything but selfish. The more I attended to my basic needs, took time to relax and regroup, the better I felt about my new life as a parent. Hopefully the skills that I learnt will be invaluable to the positive example I set for Addison. I never wanted to put unrealistic expectations on myself to maintain my old life, as I knew I had to take 'baby' steps, be patient and adjust with an open mind.

With time I was finding my old self, adapting to my new sidekick, and my new sidekick adapting to me and our lifestyle. Life is definitely different. Gone are the days of just being able to jump in the car and go. I now pack what feels like the whole bedroom to make sure I'm prepared for the poo explosion. Trust me – the day you don't pack it, will be the day you need it. This is not quite as simple as carrying your multi-tool pocket knife around.

When Addison was quite a few months old, and I had begun to feel more comfortable in my role as a mother, I received a few calls in regard to wild dogs causing havoc with people's domestic dogs and livestock. Reports were coming in hard and fast about a particular female wild dog that was luring the male domestic dogs out on nightly rampages.

We have a large reserve where there is an abundance of wildlife, houses and livestock surrounding it. This female was sighted travelling from house to house and seen only 10m from back doors of houses. So, our local council closed off the reserve and I assisted by putting up trail cameras on a particular property where the dog had been with a domesticated male dog.

The day had come, and I was back at it. I couldn't have felt happier to help our

local council collect data and pics of the offending dog, tracking her movements, her locations, the path of destruction she left behind. Our afternoon walks now had added meaning and purpose – checking trail cameras and putting out pre-feed to lure her in, leading to putting traps in the ground.

And let me tell you how interesting it is to do that with a six-month-old. One half of the LandCruiser was packed with a Jolly Jumper, rug and nappy bag. The other half a trapping bag, with traps, lures and all the other necessities. Being on maternity leave I had all the time in the world to set up Addison safely on the rug in the Jolly Jumper in the shade of a tree. She was in her element, bouncing away watching the trees in the breeze, listening to the birds, and with mum in sight.



*A clean, humane
despatch is of
upmost importance
so no animal suffers.
I hope someday I
can pass on these
basic fundamentals
of ethical hunting/
pest control...*



Winston and Addison have become good friends.



A mangy fox wanders into the picture.



A canine pair up to no good.

I could then get stuck into setting traps and checking cameras. Having this time in our community gave me a great connection with the locals, meeting new people and looking out for each other. Also, the property owners loved catching up with Addison, watching her grow and meet milestones. A great sense of community connection and good friendships were made.

Having the time to explain to the property owners about trappers' frustrations was fulfilling. The general public have this idea that you're awesome and have the ability to trap a wild dog on the first day, which is far from the truth. I was able to explain the way wild dogs work. Outlining to them that due to the location and being so close to neighbouring properties we don't want to trap next door's dog. We have to monitor the area first, setting up trail cameras and making sure we are only dealing with the wild dogs and no collateral damage would be done.

With the problem of the domestic dogs passing through, I thought it would be safer to use a Victor Soft Catch trap with two or four springs. With so many properties around and houses close by, sitting out at night with the .300 Blackout and thermal wasn't an option. The thermal also can't distinguish between wild and domestic dogs, as they all glow white hot.

Once the cameras were set, it started to show the bigger picture of the habits of some of the wild dogs and how often they would pass through. The more time I spent watching this specific dog on the camera I knew it wasn't going to be easy.

The general public have this idea that you're awesome and have the ability to trap a wild dog on the first day, which is far from the truth. I was able to explain the way wild dogs work.

She was trap savvy. And she would look directly into the camera for a photo.

She would lure male domestic dogs from streets away. Being able to notify the owners of what their dogs get up to at night-time while they slept was a bit of a surprise to them. But, once I informed them, they were able to mend fences and keep their dogs secure. This female wild dog was elusive, only passing through once every couple of weeks. This went on for a few months. In the meantime, I was able to trap a few pesky foxes with mange. This process kept us busy and happy, including our walks every afternoon with the cows, so life was good.



The night-time marauder captured on camera.

One of the questions I'm asked regularly is: "How can you shoot an animal when you call yourself an animal lover?" For me, the answer is quite simple – I do what I do because I love animals. I respect the job must be done and I can make sure if I'm a part of it, it will be done with care and respect. I do not celebrate taking an animal's life, but I am proud of the work I do for preserving Australia's heritage.

A clean, humane despatch is of upmost importance so no animal suffers. I hope someday I can pass on these basic fundamentals of ethical hunting/pest control and care for native wildlife to Addison. I have a beautiful healthy happy girl, who loves the outdoors as much as I do.

As a parent, I will aim to be the best role model possible for her. I want to pass on my passions, skills and knowledge to Addison about the great Australian outdoors. Hopefully, this will in time inspire her to carry on learning and always take the next step. To bring up my daughter in the conservation wildlife world means a lot to me. All being well, she will grow to enjoy thrilling outdoors experiences in the years ahead.

Performance plateaus

– learning curves a part of shooting

Gemma Dunn

Before we get into it, I want you to think back to ANY time in your when life learnt a new skill. Think about how you first learnt the skill, then went on to apply it and how it worked out for you in the end.

I am sure that nearly every single one of us can remember a time where we just got stuck in a rut and couldn't improve for a long time. Then all of a sudden things were on the up again! That rut has a technical term as a 'performance plateau'.

Before we understand how plateaus happen and how to overcome them, we must first understand the process of skill acquisition.

Skill acquisition has three main phases:

Cognitive phase

In this stage of learning, performances are inconsistent and success is not guaranteed. Performing the skill requires all of your attention and you rely on outside influences more (a coach, parent or mentor). The cognitive phase is very much a process of trial and error, with an average success rate of 2-3 out of 10 attempts. External feedback is really crucial at this point of learning, as it helps shape your progress enormously.

Associative phase

This phase is also known as the 'practice phase' because performances are becoming more consistent and you are forming 'muscle memory'. Here, the simple parts of the skill will be more fluent, but the complex elements still require most of your attention.

You will begin to get a sense of 'kinaesthetic' feedback when you perform the skill well and won't rely on external cues as much. Because of this, you will be able to detect and correct your own errors and increase a success rate to 50-70 per cent.

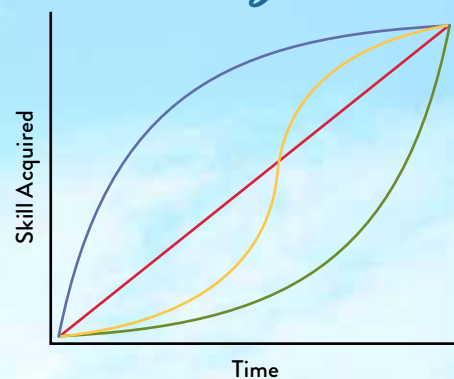
Autonomous phase

This is the final stage of learning and your performances will have become consistent, fluid and aesthetically pleasing. The motor programs involved are well learned and stored in long-term memory (remember the phrase: "You never forget how to ride a bike").

This stage allows your spare attention to focus on opponents and tactics. During this phase, to retain the new skill you must be constantly practising to enforce the motor programs and you will see a 90-100 per cent success rate here.

The problem is all of these things are invisible and hard to track. So how do we measure it to work out whether or not skill acquisition is actually happening? Well, the answer is to look at performance either in training or competition.

Learning curves



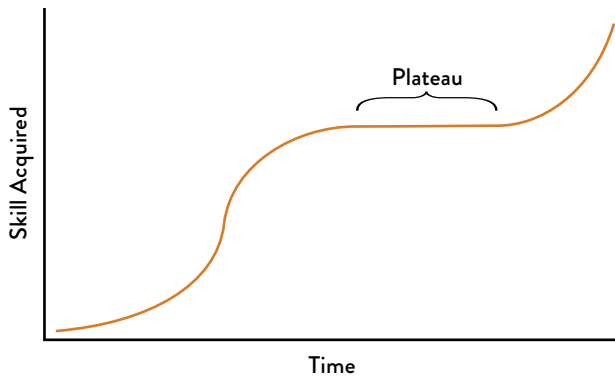
Linear: The skill increases in direct relationship to the time spent on the skill.

Negative acceleration: Rapid early learning that slows after the initial stages.

Positive acceleration: Slow early learning that, after refinement, increases rapidly.

S-Shaped: A combination of negative and positive learning curves. Often seen in multiple coordinated movements with added difficulty in the refinement stage.

Performance plateau



Plateau: A period of time where there is little or no progress in skill acquisition.

Causes of plateaus

Psychological factors

Psychological factors that can cause a plateau are, but not limited to, motivation, performance anxiety and boredom.

Physical fitness

Physical factors that can cause a plateau are, but not limited to, injury, sickness, incorrect training regime and a long break.

Change in technique

Technical factors that can cause a plateau are adapting a new style or approach, which takes time to learn as it is a new skill.

Cognitive strategy changes

Cognitive strategy factors that can cause a plateau are, but not limited to, a change in pre-event routine and learning new visualisation techniques.

The best way to measure the change in performance is plotting over time the results of your performance to form a graph, or as they are more commonly referred to, 'learning curves'. Therefore, when we see a positive improvement of a performance over time, we know that the process of skill acquisition is happening.

What is a plateau?

A plateau is a period of time where there's little or no progress in skill acquisition. A plateau can go for a long or a short period of time. Sometimes, without the guide of a learning curve chart, you might not even realise you have gone through a plateau, as they can be so short. Other times, they can seem to go on for forever and be extremely frustrating for both yourself and your coach.

Overcoming a plateau

It's important to make sure you understand that plateaus are an integral part of the skill acquisition process. It is normal and to be expected.

You should look to your coach or trusted mentor to help identify a plateau, and for assistance in navigating it. Remember to not let it knock the wind out of your sails.

Work with your coach on where you are at with the skill and allow them to help you manage any plateaus. A progress diary or chart is often good to track your progress easily.

So, how can a plateau be overcome?

Firstly, do not try to compare your plateaus to others. Make sure you manage your expectations during the skill acquisition process by understanding the reasons behind plateaus and be reassured by the fact that they are inevitable and things will work out in the long term.

You should also plan and share goals with your coach or mentor to avoid becoming bogged down. Always have structured training sessions that can help demonstrate your progress – no matter how much it is. And lastly, you can seek psychological support from your coach/mentor or a professional sports psychologist who can work with you on developing tools to help you out of a plateau.

It's important to make sure you understand that plateaus are an integral part of the skill acquisition process.



Coober Pedy Top Gun

Wayne Cooper is more than proud of his daughter after an action-packed weekend away

My daughter Monique and I were up at 7am and ready for the five-and-a-half-hour drive from Port Augusta to Coober Pedy for the inter-club shoot with the SSAA Cadell Pistol Club and SSAA Coober Pedy Shooters Club.

It promised to be a March weekend full of shooting with great people and good memories to be made. Our first stop was the Glendambo Roadhouse with time to stretch the legs, grab a bite to eat and then it was back on the road. As we were driving out of Glendambo, I said to Monique: "Not far now – only 253 kilometres to go." She just looked at me with a little smile and replied: "Very funny, dad."

Then came disappointment on her face as she looked at her mobile phone and noticed she had no reception. As we finally approached Coober Pedy, the opal city, Monique realised she had reception again. She looked at the maps on her phone then said: "Dad, it looks like we are in the middle of South Australia, the middle of nowhere."

I had a chuckle as we pulled up at The Opal Cave where an old spaceship is placed that was used as a prop in the sci-fi movie *Pitch Black*, which was filmed around Coober Pedy. Next port of call was Umoona Opal Mine & Museum to have a look at some opal, which Monique had never seen before in person. We also wanted to discover what it was like to go underground, which was another first for her. After picking her 16th birthday present, Monique selected something for her two sisters, little brother and of course something for my beautiful wife for helping to make the trip possible.



The spaceship from the film *Pitch Black*.



When we arrived at the SSAA Coober Pedy Shooters Club and stepped out of the car, Monique looked at me to say: "What's with all the flies?" So, I handed her a fly net to put over her head and said it's the fashion here, everyone wears them. But no, that wasn't happening. However, it was time to sign in, meet some new people and set up camp ready for a big weekend of shooting and flies.

The next day we were ready for the shooting to begin as we relished in an amazing Coober Pedy sunrise, before we headed over to the first course of IPSC shotgun ground targets.

Monique was anxious and unsure, but she had some help from Amy Di Donna with the club's .410 shotgun and also assistance from Range Officer John Di Donna as she walked down the course. She was shaky and nervous at the start but finished well.

Next was an ICORE course, with the steel plates challenge something new for the both of us. Monique was more comfortable with the .22 Browning Buck Mark and off she went. With thanks to Stuey and Michelle Thomas for the loan of the pistol.

Once the course was completed, we broke for lunch then lined up for the rimfire 50m and 100m Rapid Fire challenges. Monique was the only junior for this shoot and performed creditably against the adults. With a show of true sportsmanship from all, she was allowed to take a bit more time on the course to safely finish her shoots. That completed day one, so it was



The steel plate challenge was a further test for Monique.



Monique earnestly tackles the ICOR steel plates.



Time for a brief pause for Monique on the 50m rimfire challenge.

time to relax, wait for the sun to go down and the flies to disappear.

Sunday, day two, started with a steel plate challenge with pistols then it was off to the rifle range for the 100m centre-fire rifles. Monique lined up using my Mossberg .223 that she had only ever shot once before at the range, but she gave it a go. That concluded the main shooting for the weekend.

Monique was presented with the Junior Top Gun trophy for the weekend and couldn't keep the smile off her face.

However, Amy Di Donna came over and asked Monique if she would like to have a try at her Target rifle chambered in .308. I was a little surprised when she said yes but off they went. Monique sat there staring down the scope then took the shot and sat back with a grin from ear to ear and a look of surprise and excitement on her face. Amy loaded another round in the chamber for her and away she went without hesitation.

All the guns and ammunition were packed away and we headed to the Opal Inn for dinner and the presentations. As the night went on Monique heard her name called out. She looked at me with a hint of surprise and embarrassment on her face and said: "Do I have to go up there?" I laughed and said yes.

Monique was presented with the Junior Top Gun trophy for the weekend and couldn't keep the smile off her face. The presentations were complete, so we headed back to camp for some much-needed rest after a great weekend of shooting. We were up at 7am, packed up camp and set off for home.

We would both like to say a big thank you to everyone from the SSAA Cadell Pistol Club and SSAA Coober Pedy Shooters Club for the great weekend. A special nod to Michelle Thomas for the photos and also to Stuey Thomas, John Di Donna and his daughter Amy Di Donna for the help and coaching Monique, including the safe use of their firearms. It was much appreciated.



A happy Monique displays her trophy at the presentations.



Wayne and Monique at the presentation dinner.



Concentration is the key for Monique on the rimfire range.



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