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From the Editor

Australian Hunter 71 is our last for the year and we cap off 2019 in style. There's a foray into the field as Don Caswell combats the 'ninja' wild dogs of far North Queensland, Brad Allen follows the signs to take down bucks, John Dunn flies into the Top End's stunning Cobourg Peninsula for bantengs and a spot of fishing, Ben Unten comes to terms and settles with a solitary swine, Leon Wright delivers a valid reminder to not forget the dams when after ducks, David Duffy is on the prowl for a crafty feral cat and Mick Chapman turns a decade-long kudu nightmare into an African dream.

We focus with the Steiner Ranger 2.5-10x50 riflescope and two Cuddeback trail cameras, brighten up the world with Lightforce Striker LED Driving Lights and Nextorch TA40 LED torch set, look at ways to customise your hunting rifle then drill down to a method for bedding a CZ, fire Browning's BXR Rapid Expansion ammo, hunt with the Barrett Fieldcraft Lightweight rifle, keep the .257 Roberts pertinent and weigh up hunting with handload versus factory ammo.

There's nothing worse than being uncomfortable when out and about and we stay cool in Austealth camo clothing and *Australian Hunter* shirts. Further to

practicality in tough Aussie conditions, we also put on a Ridgeline Tru-Shot backpack which doubles as a handy rest for more accurate shooting.

Many Australians have an old five-burner barbecue lying around and we turn one into the ultimate outdoor Asian kitchen to cook up delicious rabbit and bacon spring rolls, spicy Szechuan venison and sizzling hot Mongolian goat.

Moving on, we revisit the art of knife sharpening, stick out from the crowd with a Van Diemen's Land Pig Sticker and find the right groove with Buck's Model 105. There are also four fantastic prizes up for grabs.

Stay in touch with Australia's favourite hunting magazine 24/7 on Facebook and keep an eye out for our ongoing online competitions.

The nation's leading hunting publication wishes you a happy and safe Christmas that's hopefully filled with time with your loved ones and an opportunity or two for a decent hunt. We look forward to bringing you more hunting goodness in the New Year!

Thomas Cook
Editor



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The dark side of jungle dogs

Don Caswell



Even a scatty little bush
can be an effective hide.

Rarely seen in daylight, they are truly ninja dogs of the dark humid night.



A large black bitch where she fell – on top of a dead calf.

Wild dogs are never easy. That is especially so for the black jungle dogs of far north Queensland. These wary predators emerge from their lairs in dense tropical forest to raid bordering farmland. Rarely seen in daylight, they are truly ninja dogs of the dark humid night. Mostly, sometimes completely, black in colour, they are similar in appearance to Doberman dogs. Slipping in and out of the great national park foliage, they vanish as soon as they enter the curtained gloom of the rainforest.

The only opportunity to hunt them is by ambush as they transit to or from their home in the jungle, or by calling them out. Either way, hunting these dogs is a twilight exercise. Trail cameras are most useful in determining how many, what type and when these wild canines are passing through. There is one

particular farm close to where I live that I hunt regularly with success. This beef cattle property is bordered on three sides by jungle wilderness. Not only does it suffer significant attacks on cattle and calves, it also provides a conduit for the wild dogs to attack neighbouring farms that are further away from the jungle.

On this particular farm, a finger of rainforest protrudes well into the property, in the form of a thickly vegetated creek. The creek loops between steep spurs and ridges that provide a vantage point for shots at wild dogs using the gully as a highway. I drive to the location in the dark of pre-dawn. The last couple of kilometres I drive slowly with the vehicle lights off. The wheel marks of the farm access track are quite visible in the lush green grass despite the dark of night. After parking the vehicle, I kit-up and consider the wind which varies



The dark side of jungle dogs

with the season. Another consideration is how thick the grass is. During the dry, it is cropped to a lawn-like state by the cattle. However, as the wet season kicks in, the grass grows rapidly and when it is chest deep my hunting season is over. In grass that deep, you would have trouble spotting a rhinoceros let alone wild dogs.

If the grass is reasonably short, most times the prevailing breeze requires me to hike a kilometre or so, up and around to gain the ridge top. I time this walk so that first light is just seeping in. I carry a hiking staff whose main role is for prodding ahead of me in the hope it will induce any taipans or brown snakes to move away rather than bite me. As I progress, I keep a good lookout all about me. This has paid dividends a few times when I have spotted dogs and put a shot away. It does require discipline to avoid the temptation provided by feral pigs that I regularly see. One morning, sneaking in with high confidence based on recent trail camera photos, a mob of eight large hogs ambled across in front of me, not 50m away. With a twitching trigger finger, I remember



thinking to myself that there had better be a wild dog awaiting me or I would be sorely grieved. Luckily, that day at least, there was a wild dog and my discipline was rewarded. Occasionally, if I figure no dogs are likely to appear, I have shot the odd boar to top up the carrion pile.

My first ambush point on this route is an old fence post right on the highest part

of the ridge. The edge of the jungle in the creek below is 300m away. I spend some time there, glassing carefully, looking for any sign of wild dogs. At this spot, I refrain from any calling as it is exposed and I intend sneaking down the spur to go closer. A series of old fence posts, devoid of wire, runs down the spur. My preferred spot is about halfway down the steep slope.

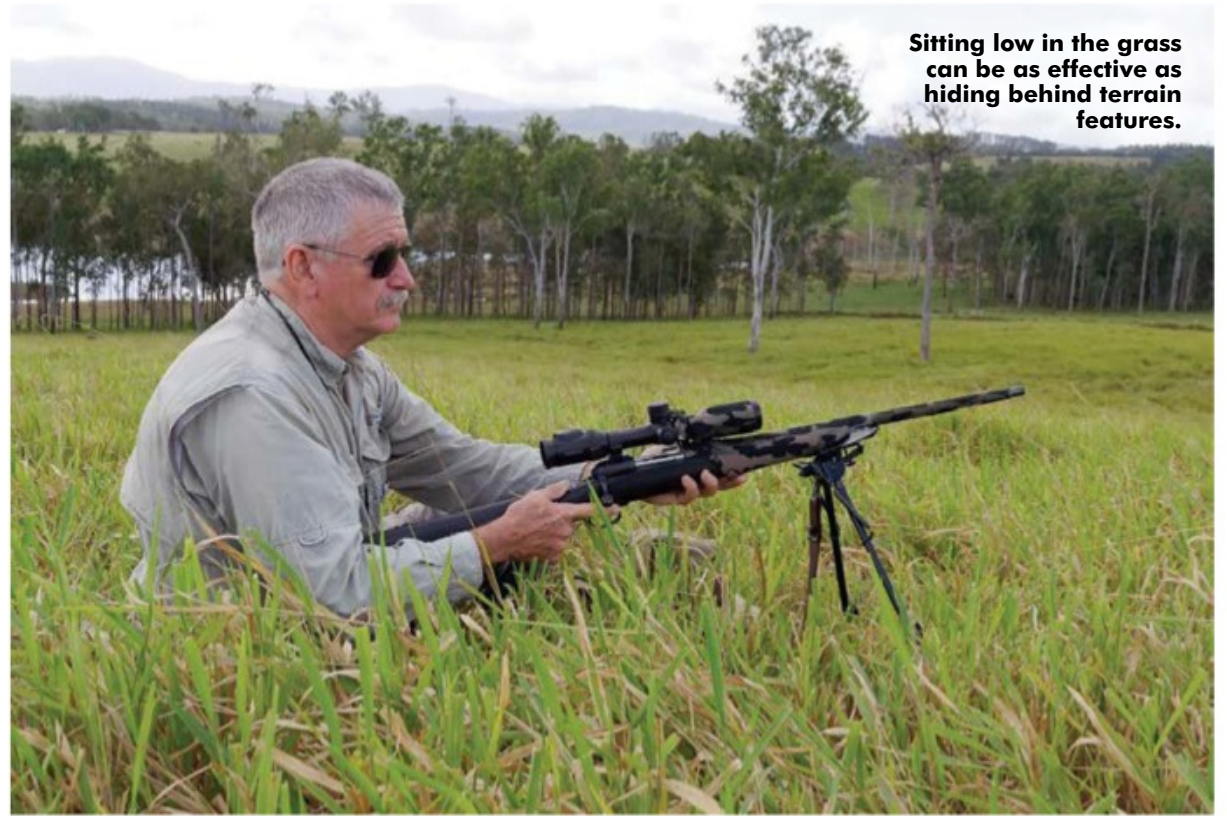


The dark side of jungle dogs

Depending on the grass height, I either sit with my back to the post or slide down the slope another 10m for better vision. Sitting still in the pasture has proved to be just as effective as using shrubs or old logs for shelter. Once I am comfortable, I have a good look about and then start calling.

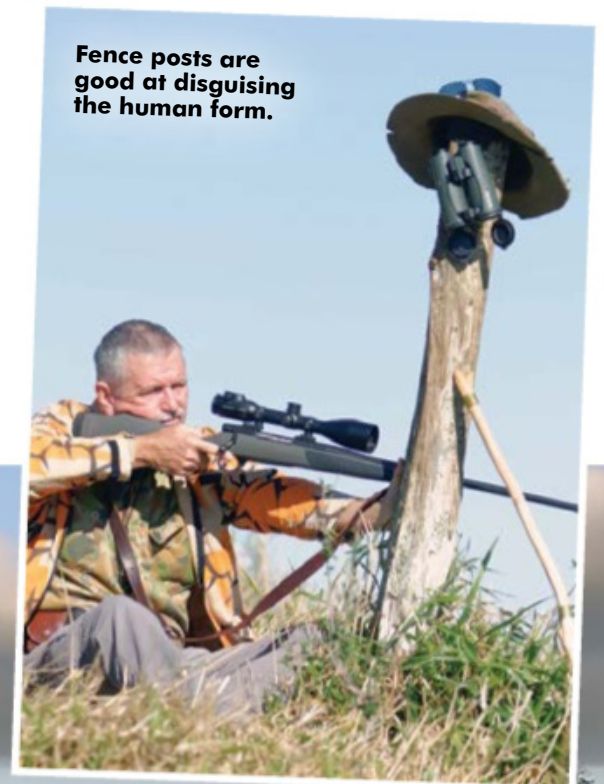
Mostly, wild dogs will come from either left or right, tracking along the creek. However, on other occasions, they have just popped out of the jungle, or come trotting down the slope from above and behind me. My other option, depending on the wind and grass, is a more direct approach in along the creek. If there are no kills on the creek floodplain, I slowly make my way up to the spur. Sometimes if there is a dead beast lying in the grass, I use the breeze to my advantage. In doing that I have shot a number of wild dogs that were feeding on the carcass. The thick green grass and light breeze mask the sound of my passage. I have shot a few dogs at about 30m distance using this technique.

I know my ranges well, having used my Leupold rangefinder on many earlier hunts to determine the distance to prominent



Sitting low in the grass can be as effective as hiding behind terrain features.

logs and rocks that mark my 300m arc of fire. I do not need to check the range once any dogs cross that invisible boundary line. My longest successful shot at this location was getting out to about 300m. It was an afternoon hunt and I had been sitting on the ridge for an hour before the sunset. The sun had been gone some 15 minutes and the dusk was rapidly descending >



Fence posts are good at disguising the human form.



It is best to call from a bit of cover or sitting position.

The dark side of jungle dogs

on the valley. I was slowly packing my kit when I became aware of a black speck out on the pastured hill, about 700m away. A quick look through my binoculars showed a large black dog staring in my direction. I was sitting in a big tuft of grass and he was off to my left. I figured he had seen me but not realised I was a human hunter. I carefully brought my hands up to my mouth and gave a long dog wail. The dog jumped up and came trotting towards me.

When he disappeared behind some bushes, I used that opportunity to change position. I made myself comfortable, chambered a round in my .257 Weatherby Magnum, and trained the rifle on the creek crossing that was about 250m from me. I expected him to wade the creek and emerge onto the flat on my side to give me a shot. However, after a careful approach to the creek, the dog refused to cross. The light was rapidly fading. My big Swarovski scope, with its illuminated centre dot, gave me a great advantage in the lowlight conditions, but even that would not last long. As the dog trotted back and forth



Another black alpha male called out of the jungle.

along the creek I decided to try another howl to see if he would stop. It was too far in uncertain light to try a running shot.

At my call, the dog squatted to mark his territory with a scat. My 110-grain Nosler AccuBond slipped through a gap in the trees and killed him instantly. He was a big old boy too, with a greying

muzzle. I recognised him from trail camera photos over the preceding year. Flicking through my diary, I reckon I am successful in shooting a dog about one in 10 hunts. That means, for each wild dog I shoot, I walk about 30 kilometres. In those terms, I reckon I well and truly earn every jungle dog I take. ■

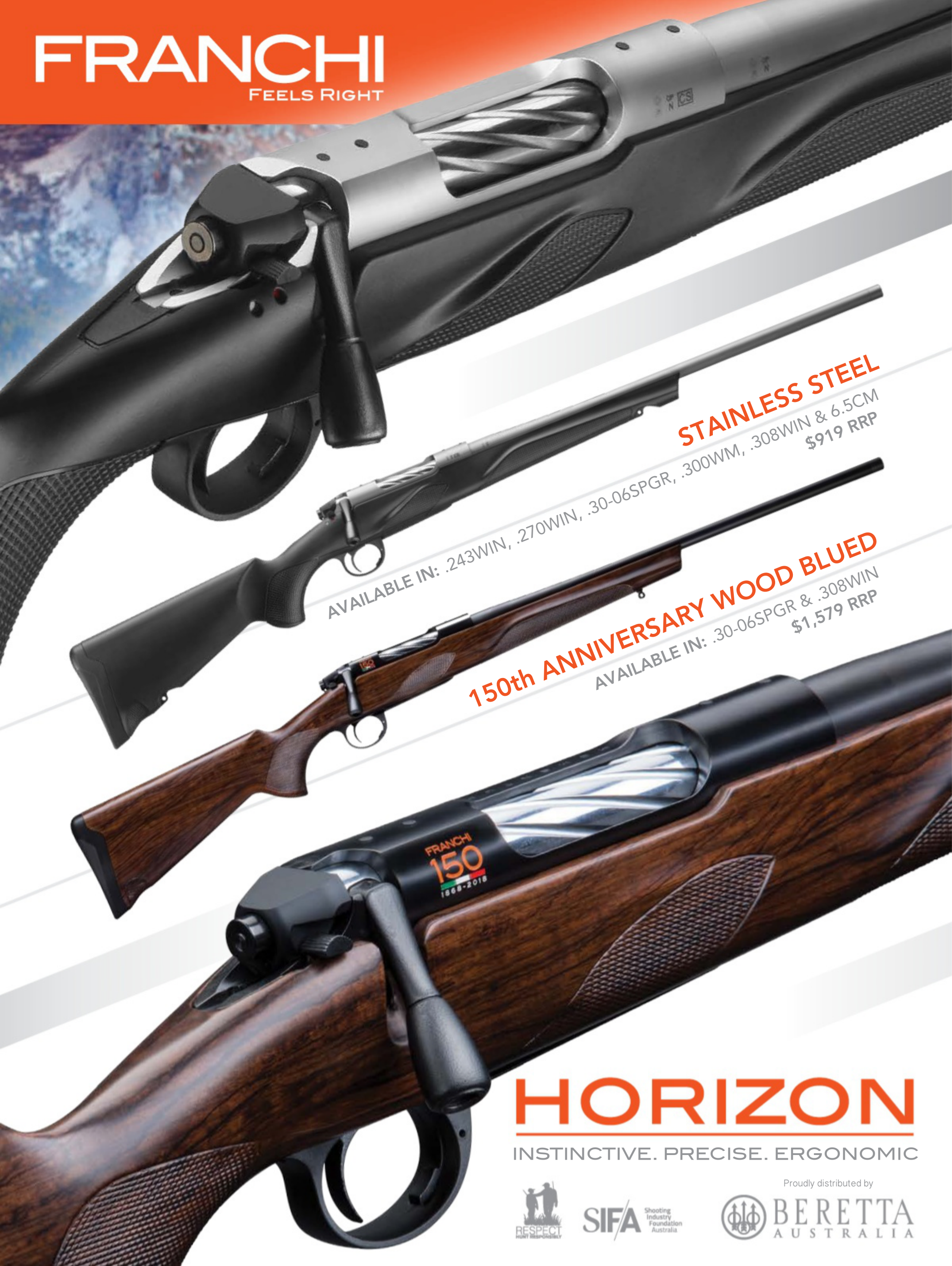


The trail camera caught Don approaching past a dead boar and wild dog.

A Federal factory 80-grain SP in .243 Win was more than enough for this wild dog.

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Browning's BXR Rapid Expansion ammunition

Con Kapralos



Con Kapralos range tests the Browning BXR .243 ammunition at the SSAA Monarto Range.

I vividly recall the late 1980s when my interest in hunting and shooting was just starting. An uncle had introduced me to the shooting sports and I remember many winter evenings sitting in his back shed chatting about shotguns, rifles and many more shooting- and hunting-related topics. We would enter his reloading room where he would show me all the different calibres and makes of ammunition he had for his impressive firearms collection. For a newcomer to the sport, I was keen to absorb as much knowledge and information as I could.

I recollect he had a brand of ammunition in his cabinet which comprised of both rimfire, shotshell and centrefire, with a cream-coloured carton and a brown logo on the box - Browning by Fabrique Nationale (FN), Herstal, Belgium. I still bring to mind prising open a box of 32g field loads and examining the contents, with their chocolate-brown, one-piece compression formed hulls, which certainly looked like serious

hunting loads. That Browning ammunition was a quality product, superbly finished and packaged. I was lucky enough to have used some of my uncle's shotshells when chasing rabbits in South West NSW. They certainly performed well and such memories still linger some 30 years later.

When hearing in 2016 that Browning was going to re-enter the ammunition stakes once again with a complete line-up of rimfire, centrefire, shotshell and handgun ammunition, I was just as enthused as any diehard Browning fan would be. It was almost like being reacquainted with an old friend. Upon talking with Winchester Australia, the Browning importer and distributor in Australia, samples of the new centrefire ammunition were arranged for initial testing and evaluation. Winchester Australia supplied staples from the Browning BXR centrefire ammunition range, which comprises of seven different calibres/loadings.

The other offerings in the Browning centrefire line-up include the BXC, which comprises of six different calibres/loadings as well as the BXV, a range of tailored varmint loads. The BXR range is loaded with non-bonded Rapid Expansion Matrix Tip projectiles, designed to do what the name implies on thin-skinned medium to large



A visual comparison of the tested Browning BXR ammunition: the .30-06 Sprg, left, .270 Win, .308 Win and .243 Win. All samples are entirely nickel-plated and of high quality.

Browning’s BXR Rapid Expansion ammunition

game, whereas the BXC loads contain Controlled Expansion Deep Penetrating Terminal Tip projectiles, designed for deeper penetration on thick-skinned, large game. The BXV varmint range comprises of calibres such as the .22 Hornet, .223 and .22-250 Remington as well as a .243 Winchester load, all with varmint-style projectiles.

The BXR range up close

Winchester Australia provided samples of the Browning BXR loads in .243, .270 Win and .308 Winchester and .30-06 Springfield. The BXR projectiles are non-bonded, consisting of a lead core with a thin, nickel-plated brass jacket topped off with an aerodynamic tip made from a proprietary mixture of 85 per cent copper and 15 per cent polymer. This is designed to fragment upon impact, the tip leaving a large hollow point at the front of the main projectile, allowing it to expand and transfer its energy to the target. The tip, with its copper/polymer matrix, is very similar if not identical to the tips on the Winchester Deer Season XP ammunition, which I have used with excellent results on medium to large game such as fallow and red deer.

Interestingly, Browning has decided quite cleverly to tailor-make each load for a given calibre and offer it in one bullet weight. In the BXR, the loads consist of the .243 Win (97-grain), .270 Win (134-grain), along with the .30-30 Win, .308 Win, .30-06 Sprg, .300 Win Mag and .300WSM (all sporting the 155-grain projectile). The ammunition itself utilises nickel-plated brass casings, which complement the nickel-plated projectiles and makes for an attractive overall load.

Browning has even decided to impart its ‘Buckmark’ branding to the head-stamp of the case, which is something quite novel. All packaging on the BXR range consists of a predominantly black and yellow box with the Browning branding evident, plus the BXR nomenclature as well as calibre and bullet weight. Ballistic data and features of

Velocity (feet per second)								
Calibre	Bullet weight (grains)	Projectile ballistic coefficient	Muzzle	100m	200m	300m	400m	500m
.243 Win	97	0.371	3100	2840	2594	2361	2140	1932
.270 Win	134	0.464	3060	2852	2654	2465	2283	2109
.30-30 Win	155	0.240	2390	2051	1743	1472	1250	1093
.308 Win	155	0.405	2820	2595	2382	2178	1984	1803
.30-06 Sprg	155	0.405	2920	2690	2472	2264	2066	1879
.300 Win Mag	155	0.405	3260	3012	2778	2555	2343	2141
.300WSM	155	0.405	3260	3012	2778	2555	2343	2141
Energy (foot-pounds)								
Calibre	Bullet weight (grains)	Projectile ballistic coefficient	Muzzle	100m	200m	300m	400m	500m
.243 Win	97	0.371	2069	1736	1449	1201	987	804
.270 Win	134	0.464	2786	2421	2096	1807	1551	1323
.30-30 Win	155	0.240	1966	1448	1046	746	538	411
.308 Win	155	0.405	2737	2315	1952	1632	1355	1119
.30-06 Sprg	155	0.405	2934	2491	2103	1764	1469	1215
.300 Win Mag	155	0.405	3657	3122	2655	2247	1899	1578
.300WSM	155	0.405	3657	3122	2655	2247	1899	1578
Trajectory (100 yards zero in inches)								
Calibre	Bullet weight (grains)	Projectile ballistic coefficient	Muzzle	100m	200m	300m	400m	500m
.243 Win	97	0.371	-1.5	0	-2.8	-10.8	-25.1	-47.0
.270 Win	134	0.464	-1.5	0	-2.8	-10.5	-24.0	-44.1
.30-30 Win	155	0.240	-0.9	0	-7.4	-26.4	-61.6	-119
.308 Win	155	0.405	-1.5	0	-3.7	-13.5	-30.7	-56.2
.30-06 Sprg	155	0.405	-1.5	0	-3.3	-12.3	-28.2	-52.1
.300 Win Mag	155	0.405	-1.5	0	-2.3	-9.2	-21.4	-39.9
.300WSM	155	0.405	-1.5	0	-2.3	-9.2	-21.4	-39.9

Figures for velocity, energy and trajectory quoted by Browning Ammunition.

the ammunition within is also printed on the back of the carton. And more noticeable on the BXR packaging is a face-to-face staring match with a whitetail buck on the front of the box - an iconic American deer species in every way possible.

The BXR ammunition is not just a rebadged line from Winchester (who loads the ammunition for Browning) but a carefully created range using optimal bullet weights for the ballistics required for serious hunting - be it Australian thin-skinned

game such as small to medium deer, goats, wild dogs, pigs and similar and in the range of calibres to suit the Australian hunter.

The tables above outline the specifications of the review ammunition, as well as other loads available in the Browning BXR range.

All the review sample loads were examined for their uniformity and overall finish, with random examples from each test batch being measured for overall length with digital calipers. With the loads being

Browning's BXR Rapid Expansion ammunition

manufactured for Browning by Winchester, quality is unsurpassed, as you would expect, and the Browning BXR loads obliged.

At the range and in the field

Figures, tables and measurements may give us some useful information, but range and field testing are the best judge of the Browning BXR centrefire ammunition - after all, that's what really matters.

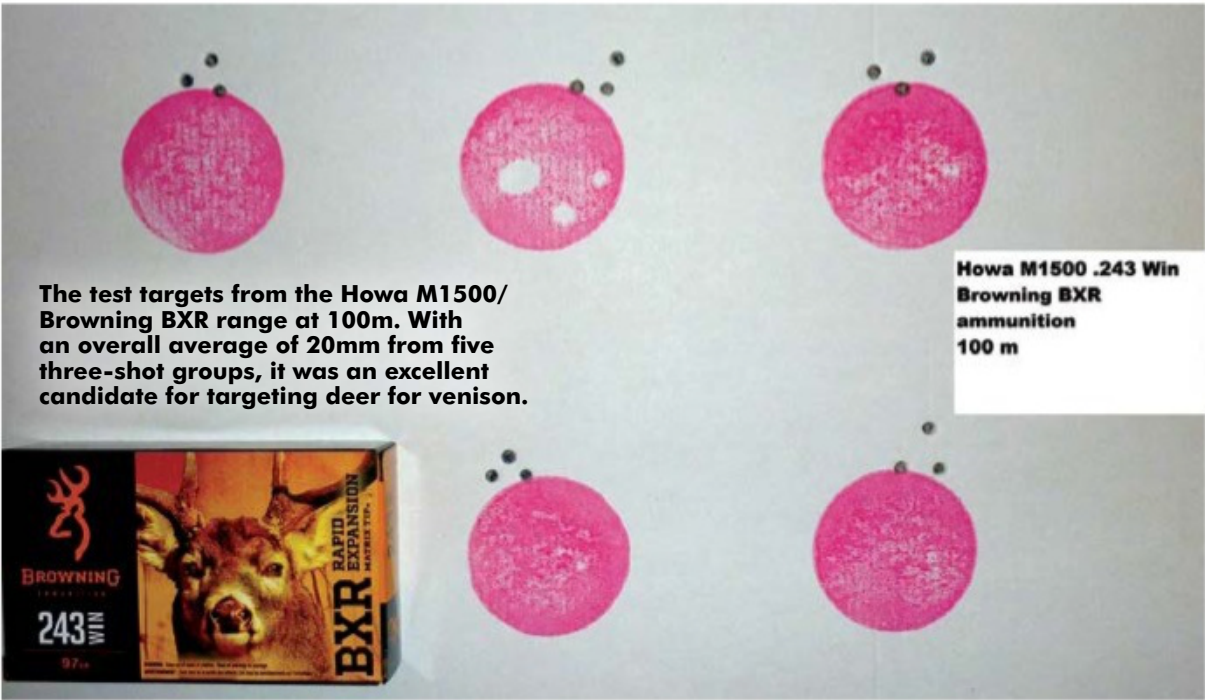
Range testing was conducted over a series of sessions utilising my own hunting rifles. All the test platforms are off-the-shelf sporting rifles fitted with hunting optics, not high magnification scopes. At a distance of 100m, five three-shot groups were run through each test rifle, allowing the barrel to cool between each three-shot string. The results of the three-shot groups are shown in the accompanying table.

All tested loads showed very good to excellent performance and would make an ideal hunting load out to around 300m and beyond if required. As always, it is wise to range test any load, as what may shoot well through one rifle may not shoot well in another.

Happily in this situation, all the reviewed Browning BXR loads shot average groups of 1.5 MOA (40mm) or less in the test platforms and of the four calibres, the .243 Win 97-grain and .308 Win 155-grain loads were chosen to be put to the test in the hunting arena. Specifically hunting deer in the colder months, these two loads took



The BXR .270 Win load with the 134-grain projectile is tailor-made for medium to large game.



The test targets from the Howa M1500/ Browning BXR range at 100m. With an overall average of 20mm from five three-shot groups, it was an excellent candidate for targeting deer for venison.

Howa M1500 .243 Win Browning BXR ammunition 100 m

Three-shot groups at 100m

Browning BXR load	Rifle	Best group	Worst group	Average group (five three-shot groups)
.243 Win 97-grain	Howa M1500	16mm	24mm	20mm
.270 Win 134-grain	Sako M85	17mm	29mm	24mm
.308 Win 155-grain	Howa M1500	31mm	50mm	38mm
.30-06 Sprg 155-grain	Howa M1500	32mm	45mm	39mm



Con Kapralos with a fallow cull buck taken during winter with the BXR .243 Win load through a Howa M1500/McMillan sporting rifle.

several deer for venison at ranges up to 200m.

In all cases, the BXR projectiles passed through the chest cavity and exited leaving a good blood trail to follow, with the quarry running no more than 50m before expiring. I made a point of shooting a little behind the shoulder when the animals were standing broadside, as I did not want to ruin the quality venison on the shoulders if possible but still achieve a humane kill. Previous experience with the Winchester Deer Season XP loads, which utilise a similar projectile to the BXR, on deer and shooting

through the shoulders resulted in massive tissue damage and meat only suitable for the farmer's dogs. Devastating yes, but if you are after meat, you need to place your shots carefully.

Nevertheless, the Browning BXR centrefire loads certainly lived up to their pedigree and are well suited to all manner of Australian pest and game species with thin skin. For larger, thick-skinned game, the Browning BXC loads are ideal.

The Browning BXR centrefire loads are reasonably priced for a premium hunting load and all good firearm retailers should have them in stock or be able to acquire them for any hunters looking for an ultra-reliable hunting load. It is pleasing to see that once again Browning is in the ammunition fray and given something for keen fans of the 'Buckmark' to use in their rifles. They perform just as well in other makes too.

For more information on the Browning BXR centrefire ammunition, look at winchesteraustralia.com.au or ask your firearms retailer. ■

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Customising your hunting rifle

David Duffy

Fitting a Wyatt extended magazine after long-throating this .270 WSM mountain rifle.

Often a hunting rifle will require some customisation to transform it to what you want. It's not always the case that 'enhancements' are to improve accuracy or aesthetics. The following are some of the changes I've done to my hunting rifles. On new rifles some modifications may void the warranty and if that is a major concern to you, then perhaps wait until any such period is over.

Bedding job

A proper bedding job, which may include floating the barrel and sometimes using

aluminium pillars, often improves the shot-to-shot consistency of a rifle. On my .270 after it was pillar bedded, groups virtually halved in size. On the other hand, a Ruger .338 RCM already shot well and after floating and bedding, it still performed the same.

There are different schools of thought on how a hunting rifle should be bedded. Some argue that with a heavy barrelled varmint rifle the barrel should be completely free floating but with a light hunting barrel the bedding compound should support a centimetre or two of the barrel. Others say that with a full-length aluminium bedding block, to just bed around the recoil lug.

There are several bedding compounds on the market. I use a Ciba-Geigy with equal portions of resin and hardener, mix in some black die and coat the bottom of the action and action screws with a release agent.

It is advisable to watch someone who is skilled at bedding rifles before you attempt it yourself.

Trigger job

It's hard to squeeze a heavy trigger without it moving the rifle off the point of aim. However, if the trigger is too light, especially when shooting offhand, it's easy to inadvertently discharge the rifle a split

second before you are properly aligned on the vital zone of the animal you are hunting. It can also be unsafe to have too light a trigger.

I bought a secondhand rifle that had undergone a trigger job and when I felt it at the gunshop, it seemed really nice and light. The problem was that upon being cocked, occasionally it would discharge – a dangerous situation. When the trigger was made heavier, there were no more infrequent discharges. Unless you really know what you are doing, trigger jobs should be left to the experts.

There are some good after-market trigger units that are superior to the factory triggers. For a heavy varmint rifle on a

Remington action, the Jewel trigger (with top safety and bolt release) is exceptional set at 16oz. On a walk-around hunting rifle, I'm usually satisfied with the factory trigger if it can be adjusted to 3lb let-off.

Custom barrel

When shooting rabbits in the 1980s in the Hunter Valley with a .220 Swift during one late afternoon, I borrowed a mate's Remington 40-X chambered in .22-250 before he re-chambered it to .22-250 Ackley Improved. His rifle had a much heavier 27¼" barrel compared to the factory medium heavy 24" barrel on my Remington 700. What impressed me about his rifle was the way it held dead still. When my rifle was eventually re-barrelled, a much heavier 27" barrel was put on. What a difference it made when trying to keep the scope still on a 350-yard rabbit.

The original barrel on a .17-222 would not shoot the 25-grain V-MAXs accurately despite exhaustive testing and having a one in nine twist. Although it shot the Hornady and Berger 25-grain hollow-points okay, it is the V-MAX that has an acceptable ballistic coefficient. When the barrel was replaced with a Pac-Nor one in nine twist 3-groove stainless barrel, not only did it shoot the 25-grain V-MAXs well, but there was less copper fouling of the barrel and groups would not significantly open up after about 19 shots without cleaning.

Often factory barrels shoot fine and you wouldn't replace one of these with a custom barrel until it's been shot out.



The plastic parts on the left have been replaced with custom-made steel parts on the right.

Long-throating

Some rifles have a magazine length which is a fair bit longer than the standard length of the cartridge it's chambered for. For example, the Winchester Model 70 magazine is much longer than the standard length of the .338 Win Magnum cartridge. The 225-grain Barnes TSX protrudes deeply into the case if seated at the standard length of 3.34".

After having the chamber long-throated, those projectiles can be seated out further at 3.52" without touching the lands and the cartridge still fits in the magazine. More powder can be added to increase the velocity of the projectiles. The 225-grain TSX projectiles chronograph at 2950fps out of the 25" barrel on my .338 Win Magnum



The long-throated chamber gives more powder capacity in .338 Win Mag (right)



This Ruger has the front-sight ground off, deepened magazine to hold four .338 RCM rounds, lighter trigger, silent cocking and is floated and bedded.

The recoil lug is bedded with this aluminium bedding block.

Customising your hunting rifle

giving velocities close to .340 Weatherby Mag equivalents. The spacer is easy to remove from the magazine.

Iron sights

Many hunters like to have iron sights as well as the scope on their hunting rifle. These can be useful if the scope suffers damage or is knocked out of alignment or for close-range shooting in thick cover.

On low magnification of the scope the front sight ghosts into the sight picture and I prefer not to have it. If the iron sights are attached by screws, they are easy to remove. If they are a fixture, I have them ground off and the area re-bead blasted if a stainless barrel or the barrel re-blued if chrome moly.

Heavy dangerous game rifle

The magazine was extended on my CZ so it can hold four of the large .450 Rigby cartridges. On heavy dangerous game there's always the possibility that the animal will charge and in such a scenario you won't have time to reload the magazine.

The big bore magnum cartridges put quite a deal of stress on the stock so a cross-bolt was added in a critical area to reduce the risk of the stock splitting under recoil. The heavy recoil can cause the front sling swivel to catch on any rest or even injure the left hand if the forearm of the stock is not held firmly. So a metal barrel band sling swivel alleviates this. The big bore rifles need to weigh more than normal hunting rifles and a metal barrel band sling swivel is stronger than a sling swivel screwed into a wooden stock.



The factory trigger (bottom) on this Remington 700 heavy-barrelled varmint rifle was replaced with a 16oz Jewel trigger.

Plastic parts

Although the plastics in modern rifles are generally superior to those used 30 to 40 years ago, I formed a preference for metal parts when the aggressive bore solvent I used to clean a rifle reacted with the plastic internal magazine housing. On that rifle when experimenting with different torque settings on the action screws, the same plastic magazine housing/triggerguard cracked. Although the custom-made steel magazine housing/triggerguard is heavier, it is vastly superior to the factory plastic piece which was replaced.

I try to replace plastic parts with custom-made steel options where possible. Titanium, if it were easier to work with and less expensive, would be even better in some applications than steel because of its light weight, strength and corrosion resistance.

Stock

Wood stocks look and feel good but they can swell up in bad weather and alter the point of impact. They scratch and become damaged easily and are heavy. Some factory synthetic stocks have too much flex in the forearm, don't feel right or are not pleasing to the eye. The relatively inexpensive factory synthetic stock on the Ruger Hawkeye in contrast is stiff enough, rugged, has acceptable aesthetics and feels okay, so I am happy with it.

A McMillan Edge stock can significantly reduce the weight of a rifle. McMillan stocks are high quality. On heavy barrelled varmint-type rifles I quite like the HS-Precision stocks with the full-length aluminium bedding block. There are a variety of good quality after-market stocks available.



Aluminium scope rings, a bolt shroud and floorplate plus a McMillan Edge stock and a thin barrel combine to make a lightweight mountain rifle weighing 3.2kg inclusive of scope.

Accurising

Usually with some testing of various loads you can make your rifle shoot quite well for hunting purposes. However, I had a rifle that I couldn't make group satisfactorily with any load combinations tried.

The inside of the barrel was checked and seemed okay. The action was correctly bedded into the stock and the action screws had the right torque. The factory crowning of the muzzle was redone and the bolt lugs checked to ensure they engaged evenly – no change. The bolt face was squared – no improvement. I decided to put a custom stainless barrel on.

When the gunsmith checked the front of the receiver he said that it wasn't square and the thread was not cut right. The gun shot really well with the new barrel and after he squared the front of the receiver and cut a new thread. He thought the problem was the front of the receiver and thread rather than the old barrel.



A 20½" scrub bull taken with customised CZ in .450 Rigby Rimless Mag.

Aluminium parts

If you are putting together a light mountain rifle, the Talley one-piece aluminium scope mounts and an aluminium bolt shroud will save several ounces. An aluminium floorplate also cuts the weight. None of

these parts by themselves saves much weight but together and with a lightweight stock and a thin profile barrel, a very light mountain rifle can be had.

These are only a few of the many ways you can customise your hunting rifle. ■

An advertisement for ADI World Class Powders and Ammunition. The top section features the ADI World Class logo on the left and the text "APS Australian Pistol and Shotgun FROM OUR BENCH TO YOURS" in large, bold, yellow and orange letters. Below this, a laboratory setting is shown with various glassware (flasks, beakers, test tubes) containing liquids of different colors (yellow, green, blue). In the center, there are two large black plastic jugs of powder, labeled "APS350" and "APS450". To the right, there is a red mechanical device, possibly a reloading press, and a green plastic container. The bottom right corner features a blue banner with the text "PROUDLY MADE IN AUSTRALIA" and the Australian flag.

Buck's Model 105

the right fit

Damien Edwards



The Buck Model 105, sometimes referred to by its name 'Pathfinder', is a simple 5" fixed blade knife with a modified clip point. It's a knife which has been around for a long time. The Buck Company was incorporated by Al Buck in 1961. This was the year that the company began factory production of knives in California.

The knife which was to become the Model 105 was certainly in production at the handmade level prior to that and was almost definitely available from the late 1930s. Since 1961 it has undergone a few slight cosmetic changes but the basic shape and style has remained the same. Knives made from 1961 until the end of 1966

were stamped simply with 'Buck' on the blade. From 1967 until 1971 'Buck USA' was the stamp. In 1971 Buck finally introduced model number stampings on blades, albeit inverted and from 1972 onwards the stamp was the correct way up. As with all Buck models, from the start of 1986 to present, all knives have been stamped with a date code as well.

The item itself was kindly sent by Rachel Rogers and CJ Buck of Buck Knives, Idaho. It features a black phenolic handle with attractive spacers incorporated into both the handguard and pommel. On knives made prior to 1981, two more additional spacers were found at each end of the phenolic material as well. Buck dropped

the top handle spacer in early 1981 and the bottom one later that year. Both the handguard and pommel are made from aluminium. The knife is a rat tail design whereby the blade itself tapers down and extends through the handle. This adds strength and although it is not really what you would refer to as a full-tang knife, this rat tail design is still strong enough for the knife's intended purpose.

So, what is its intended purpose? Lighter use outdoor tasks. It's not really a larger game butchering knife, although it will certainly do in a pinch. This knife will shine for breaking down larger cuts of meat, removing flesh from bone and rudimentary camp area chores. It can double just fine as your

Buck's Model 105 the right fit

dinner knife but can also be used for splitting smaller tree branches for fire building. With a blade thickness of .12" or just over 3mm, it won't remove buffalo ribs from the vertebrae, but it will most certainly make easy work of smaller game in the class of wild dogs and goats.

Being a modified clip point blade design, it's not really a supreme skinning blade. That sloping serpentine blade culminates in a small, yet still obvious clip. Looking at knife blades will reveal their maker's purpose. Clip points have a sharp yet controllable blade for piercing purposes. Buck sensibly offer the model 105 with a 5" blade which, due to its shorter length, aids in making more detailed work manageable. The longer the blade, the more difficult it is to control.

The helpful choil milled into the 105 between the base of the blade and the handguard serves as a finger groove for detailed work. When sharpened to a wicked edge (and Buck knives do have a very wicked edge), the handle can be gripped so that your trigger finger presses down into this choil. Your thumb is now positioned so that it can be slid back and forth along the spine of the blade. This gripping position allows supreme control over the blade for detailed work such as skinning. The sweeping motion of your thumb permits shallow but precise cuts. While it's a fact that most true skinning blades are of drop point design with a large belly, using a clip point in such a fashion has its advantages for skinning.

The handle ergonomics are pretty small.



Tang stamps on the Model 105s changed over time. From left to right, 1967, 1971 and a 1972-81 vintage.

I'm 6ft 1" (1.85m) and have large hands. It's a bit of a squeeze to fit all four of my fingers between the base of the handguard and the bird's head of the pommel. But that's okay because I wouldn't work a knife of this style and size hard. When holding the 105 in a pinch grip, with your trigger finger and thumb at the base of the blade, the user can slice accurately while keeping a good controlled hand purchase on the knife.

When I go out on extended hunting or camping trips, I'll often take two knives and the 105 serves extremely well as a back-up to a larger, heftier blade. The bird's head pommel is a real standout as it helps with grip comfort. I've always liked a pommel of this style on my hunting knives and Buck

incorporate this feature into a lot of their fixed blade knives.

Functional finger grooves also help align my hand where it needs to be for ease of use. A lot of folk prefer to not have grooves of this type on their knives, instead choosing to allow their fingers to rest naturally where they lay when gripping or holding. I can't say I'm one of them. The majority of my knives feature finger grooves, it's a good selling point for me. In fact when I ordered a custom Buck Model 110 folding hunter, I expressly stipulated that it be furnished with grooves. I know it's impossible to adopt a 'one size fits all' when it comes to handles of this type (or handles in general), but I find the small grooves of the 105 to be perfectly placed and functional. Comfort with a knife is important.

Let's talk steel! On current production knives 420HC is primarily used. It's easy to sharpen to a fine edge. Buck's heat treating process pioneered by industry leader Paul Bos helps to extend edge life. They make the most out of 420HC by heat treating to a Rockwell hardness of 58. This is certainly a good balance of corrosion resistance and edge retention.

If you're looking at harder use, the 105 is also available in premium S30V in limited



There's no mistaking that serpentine profile of a 105, here a 2019 model, as seen by the date code tang stamp.

Buck's Model 105 the right fit

production quantities. This is one of my favourite blade steels and is hardened by Buck to an impressive 61 Rockwell hardness. Edge retention even with extended use is phenomenal and if I could choose just a single blade steel to use for the rest of my days, S30V would be at the top of the list. You'll pay more for a premium steel but it's worth it. Sharpening takes a bit longer on account of the supreme hardness, but edge life is greatly increased.

The 105 has also been offered recently for a limited production run in 5160 spring

steel. Buck treat 5160 to a hardness of 57-58. It's not a stainless steel, so it will patina with little use. I have both a 119 and 110 in 5160 and I can attest to it as being a fine steel which can be resharpened in the blink of an eye. To match different steels, the handle can also be had in either Cocobolo Dymondwood or red micarta. Hardware can be either aluminium or brass and the model comes with a leather sheath as standard.

Due to its convenient size, the 105 is just as handy around the home for food

preparation as it is in the woods. It will slice up your roast just as well as it will process a hare or magpie goose. In a pinch, it will work just fine for slicing the fillets off a barramundi too. It isn't an unwieldy knife to carry around all day in your pack and at a mere 4½oz (128 grams), you will hardly even notice it. It would make an ideal addition for your camping pack, hiking backpack or even tackle box. It's easy to clean, care for and a cinch to sharpen, even in S30V. For its price point, it's certainly one of the better knives available. ■



A custom 105 with red micarta handle and blade made from premium S30V steel produced in 2018.

At a glance

Model: Buck 105 Pathfinder

Blade length: 5" (12.7cm), modified clip, satin finish

Weight: 128g (Phenolic handle model)

Blade material: 420 High Carbon (Standard model)

S30V and 5160 on certain variants

Approx retail: \$150 (Standard model) with sheath

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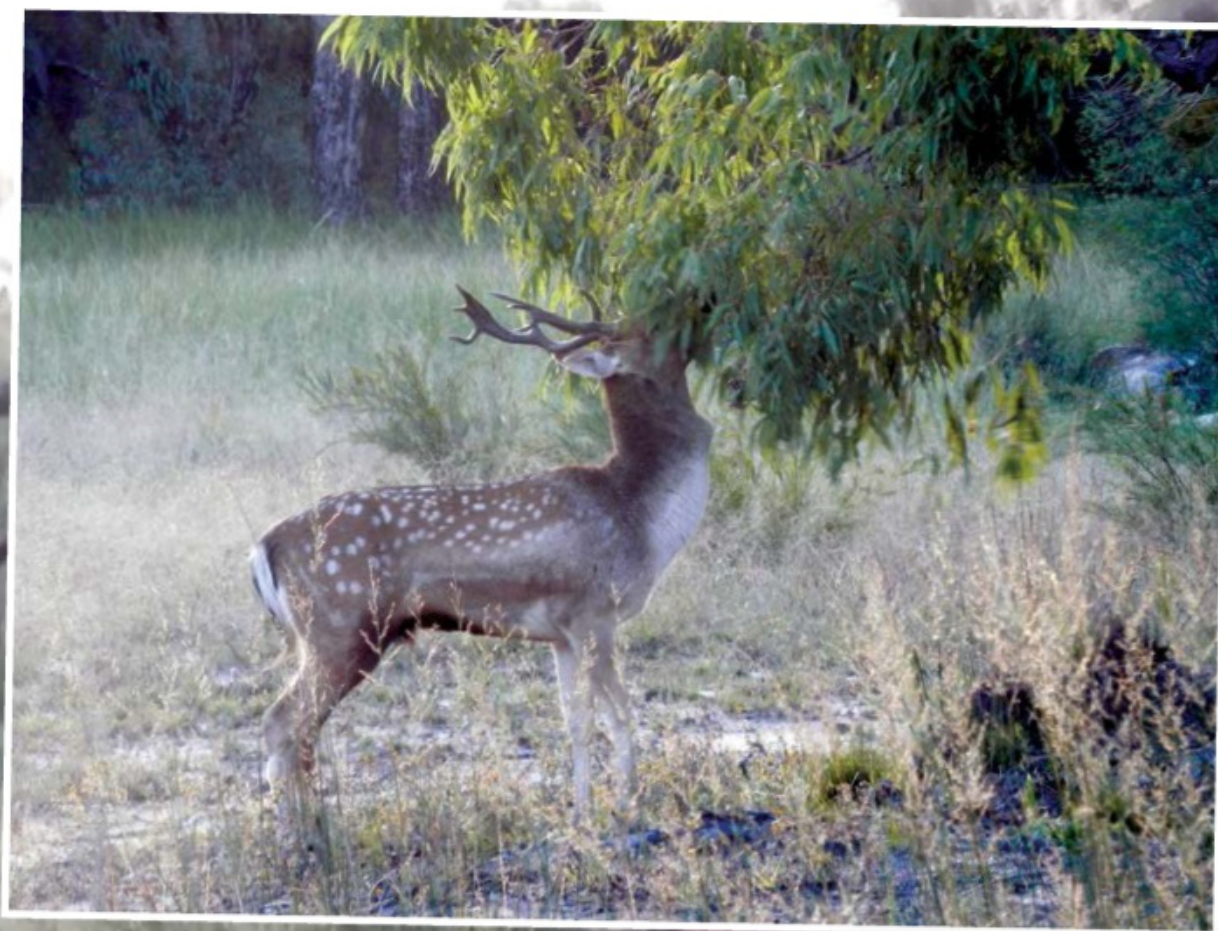




Triple treat buck hunt

Brad Allen

Morgan waiting patiently, overlooking
a scrape 130 yards downrange.



The young buck scent marking over scrapes at a clearing.

As we drove into our deer hunting property in the late afternoon, it was obvious that the rut hadn't yet begun but the start was imminent, with a large amount of fresh deer sign throughout the area. Small saplings had been thrashed around the edge of every track and clearing, with some 'not so small' trees also given the once over by the resident buck population.

We also checked some of the regular scrapes that are used each year by the dominant bucks. Most had been 'cleaned out', with fresh dirt and dust covering the surrounding foliage. Some even sported fresh damp urine-soaked patches in the middle. Things were looking good.

Up before dawn the next morning, we headed out from camp on foot. There was a brisk freshness to the cool April air as we quietly made our way to the top of the big hill behind camp. We sat contentedly listening to the sounds of the bush as we

scanned the paddocks below with our binoculars.

With only a limited amount of time on our hands, my son Morgan, nephew Frank and I were intent on making the most of this hunting opportunity. However, even with an abundance of fresh sign, not one buck had yet started croaking. We couldn't hear them, but we knew that there were plenty about.

As the sun rose over the eastern range, visibility slowly improved and we were finally rewarded with the sight of a young buck at several hundred yards, skirting the edge of an open paddock, checking out scrapes. With small antlers and no palmaria to speak of, he wasn't a shooter by any stretch and had nothing to fear from us as we watched him wander off.

Later in the morning, with no further sightings of deer from our lofty position and no 'deer noise' happening, we worked into the slight breeze on a circuit back to

Triple treat buck hunt

camp. This also proved fruitless, other than observing the abundance of fresh deer sign in the area.

By mid-afternoon, we were heading to the northern end of the property to check out the rutting stands, where some good bucks had been taken over the years. After parking the Prado, we slowly stalked into the light south-easter, edging around a clearing that had a large old scrape in the bottom of the gully.

We all froze in our tracks behind some thin scrub as we noticed movement less than 100 yards ahead near the scrape. A young buck was casually ambling towards our position, occasionally stopping to scent mark overhanging trees and sniff smaller scrapes. At a mere 50 yards, as his head was obscured, I carefully took out my camera and snapped off a few frames as he scratched at a small scrape and scent marked the overhanging foliage, before continuing on across the open paddock and over the boundary fence into the scrub of the neighbouring property. There were smiles all round as we realised just how special this moment had been.

Moving on to the next clearing, we checked out another scrape that is used every year. Recent activity suggested that it was being worked by a buck and maybe worth staking out. With this in mind, we returned before sunrise the next day, setting



Frank with his fallow buck taken cleanly at 182 yards with his Ruger .270.

up an ambush overlooking the scrape from behind some light scrub with a camp chair and the bog pod rest from 130 yards. Early morning turned to mid-morning, which turned into late morning and no buck had bothered to turn up and still no croaking could be heard, but that's hunting.

Later that afternoon as we were almost ready to head out again, the sweet sound of a mature buck croaking finally lofted into camp. Frank had won the toss and it was his turn for the first shot. We quickly and quietly made our way to a large scrub and

tree covered rock outcrop 100 yards from camp, where we intended to scan the surrounding paddocks and tree lines in search of the buck. But, before we could start the climb, Frank crouched and indicated to the far tree line. A very respectable black fallow buck was croaking loudly as he walked through a stand of tea trees, chasing one of several does. Frank and I moved carefully forward until we could see him clearly, where I then set up the shooting sticks. Frank placed his Ruger .270 onto the sticks and wound the 3-9 Leupold up to its highest power.

It seemed like forever, but was probably only a few moments that the buck continued chasing the doe around the rutting stand before finally walking out into the clear. I ranged him at 182 yards with the Leica Geovid binoculars as Frank took aim halfway up his right shoulder. The buck was still croaking as the 130gr PMC projectile found its mark, echoing back with a resounding slap. The buck started a dead run, covering only 40 yards before pulling up in the long grass.

The happy young hunter then posed for photos with his prize before I walked back to camp and returned with the Suzuki Sierra to retrieve the animal. As evening



The smile says it all, after another very successful rut.

descended, the chorus of several more mature bucks could be heard singing to their girls. The rut had begun in earnest.

Well before dawn the next morning all hunters were out of bed and keen to get going. A quick walk in the fresh pre-dawn air had us on top of a large granite hill near camp, listening to several bucks croaking loudly below.

As the breeze had swung round to the south-west, the decision had been made for us and we moved to check out the closest of the three bucks that we could hear. Walking over the bed of dry cornflake-like ground cover proved extremely noisy, with us only able to move when the buck was croaking. He was proving difficult to catch up with, continually moving between his rutting scrapes, from a large tree on the open flat just in front of us, to several other scrapes in the tea tree scrub in the gully 500 yards further on.

Stalking past the freshly used rutting stand under the big tree, we were using a line of long grass and trees as we moved towards the tea tree gully when I caught movement to our right amid the long grass of the open paddock. The buck had circled back, again heading for the stand under the big tree that we had just stalked past.

A quick look through the binos confirmed that the buck was a good representative head, so I quickly set up the shooting sticks, as Morgan gently chambered a round in his Steyr .30-06. The buck kept croaking and



Morgan's representative buck taken at 50 yards with his Steyr .30-06.

walking towards us through the long grass and at less than 50 yards he propped as he sensed that something was not quite right.

Those couple of seconds were all that Morgan needed, sending the 180gr Barnes TSX on the short journey to the centre of the buck's chest. The shot sent the buck reeling back onto his haunches, before running flat out downhill, where he quickly expired before entering the tea tree gully, a heart shot for sure. "Well done mate, good shot," I said, as Frank also congratulated the youngest member of our team on a job well done.

The constraints of work and school beckoned to the boys, so we packed up that afternoon and headed home. However, it was a different story for me and within 48 hours I was back in camp, this time hunting by myself. So, that afternoon I headed to the eastern side of the property to check out one of my favourite areas, a zone that we hadn't hunted when the boys were with me.

Deer sign was everywhere as I pussyfooted through the thin scrub into the light south-wester. Coming up to last light, I could hear a couple of bucks croaking on the far side of the river, but on my side, they were strangely quiet. They'll still be

here somewhere, I thought as I headed towards a semi open valley, that usually hosts one or two mature bucks every season.

Right on cue, at about 150 yards, I noticed several does standing and milling about with their attention on something behind them. The light was fading fast as I trained the Leicas on the small mob and the focus of their attention became obvious. A nice buck materialised from the scrub, showing interest in one particular doe. Although it was quickly becoming more difficult to see him, I could tell that he was definitely a shooter as he had good antler length and reasonable palms on both sides. The dark curtain of night fell quickly over the valley and the mob drifted away into the bush, but I knew exactly where I had to be come first light in the morning.

Rising out of bed at 4.30am was much easier than usual and after a quick coffee, I was on my way back to the valley. As I parked the Suzuki, I quickly became aware that the buck from last evening was now croaking madly, not far from where I had left him.

A check with my ash bottle indicated that there was no breeze at all and apart from the croaking, the bush was a quiet place.



One of the larger rubs located close to a buck scrape.

Triple treat buck hunt

I suspected that he was out on an open paddock, on the far side of a small bush-filled gully that would hide my approach. So with barely enough light to see where I was going, I started moving into the gully, being careful to keep my approach as silent as possible.

As I emerged from the gully to the edge of the grass paddock, I could make out the shapes of a mob of deer 180 yards further away. The buck was frantically running back and forth after a doe as I set up my shooting sticks and a quick look through the Leicas confirmed that this was the buck I was after.

Following him through the Leupold 2.5-8 set at 8x, I was aware that I had just enough light for a shot. In fact, if he had not been out on an open grass paddock, I would have had to wait at least another 10 minutes for enough light to shoot.

Finally, he stood still in a clear area, presenting his right shoulder as he continued to croak madly. It was now or never as I took up the 1 kg trigger pressure on my Ruger .270 and as the rifle recoiled, I could see



the buck drop, as the satisfying smack of the 130gr Woodleigh rolled back to me.

As I sat with the buck waiting for enough light to take photos, I admired his handsome rack and reflected on just how

satisfying the last week of hunting had been for myself and the boys. Our deep rooted and undeniable hunting instincts and our primal urge to hunt the rutting bucks, would again be satisfied for yet another year. ■

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The Steiner Ranger 2.5-10x50 riflescope

Chris Redlich

Born out of turbulent times in Bayreuth, Germany after World War Two, Steiner-Optik has forged a reputation as a global optics leader over the past 70 years. I'd read so much about Steiner riflescopes and everyone who either owned or reviewed them was impressed. While not totally unexposed to a Steiner-Optik product previously, I'll admit I'd never used a Steiner scope.

Steiner-Optik have been making optical equipment for some of the world's defence forces, including Australia's, and about 10 years ago while on deployment in East Timor our platoon was equipped with a set of Steiner RF (range finding) Mil Spec binoculars. They were an impressive piece of kit, with crystal clear optics that took measurements across mountainous terrain

out to extended distances. So when Beretta Australia offered the latest Steiner Ranger 2.5-10x50 illuminated reticle (IR) with red dot scope for review, I jumped at it.

Out of the box

The scope arrived in a box large enough for a spotting scope and came with lens covers, microfibre cleaning cloth, warranty card and user manual. The look and feel oozed German quality and what struck me immediately was its compact size for a scope packed with big features and a 50mm objective lens.

Weighing 640g and measuring 319mm, Steiner-Optik is marketing the Ranger scope as 'short construction' and 'excellent field of view'. With four times zoom the 2.5-10x50 is what I'd regard a flexible power-to-size ratio of scope combination,

suitable for a vast array of shooting requirements. Because of its universal nature I had to decide what rifle I'd field test it on. In the end I went with two: the .22PPC for varminting and .284 Win for deer. Both hunting rifles coupled with the Steiner Ranger made for a well-balanced, compact fit.

The scope

The 30mm tube is made from a single piece of aerospace-grade aluminium and has a scratchproof, hard anodised, matte finish - a 'true' matte black finish in my opinion. The scope is nitrogen pressure-filled and waterproof to two metres. As usual the windage adjustment is on the right of the turret and elevation on top - the adjustment caps gripped easily and removed with little fuss.

The Steiner Ranger 2.5-10x50 riflescope

Bucking the trend a little compared to the majority of riflescopes, the incremental windage and elevation adjustments equal one click for 1 cm/100m. Also sharing the turret, on the left-hand side, is the brightness adjustment dial for the IR red dot. The dial is easy to use with six night-time and five day-time settings and 'off' between those settings - night and day are easily identified by the moon and sun symbols. The 3-volt CR 2032 battery for the IR is also in the adjustment dial.

The scope supplied has the 4A IR red dot in the second focal plane. An advantage of this is the reticle won't change in size when magnification is adjusted up or down. I own a pair of other European brand scopes with the 4A reticle and after using them with great success I didn't need convincing of the 4A's merits - it's perfect for drawing the target image rapidly to the centre. Plex and 4A-style reticles are my favourites.

The Ranger comes with a guide card to reference the value of the reticle subtensions. One thing I hadn't owned before was an illuminated scope and the IR gives that edge over non-illuminated when hunting the last of daylight. The benefits of the IR red dot were clear during field testing.

The dioptre adjustment ring on the ocular lens is easily turned for a clear reticle image, and at the other end of the ocular lens housing is the zoom adjustment with



full circumference rubber grip that feels firm to move. From 2.5-10x power all magnification settings are clearly marked and the desired zoom aligns itself at the 12 o'clock position. The 2.5-10x50 has no parallax adjustment and is set from the factory at 100m. At the business end is Steiner's High Contrast 50mm objective lens coated with 'Nano Protection' to help repel water, dust, snow and fingerprints.

Sighting-in

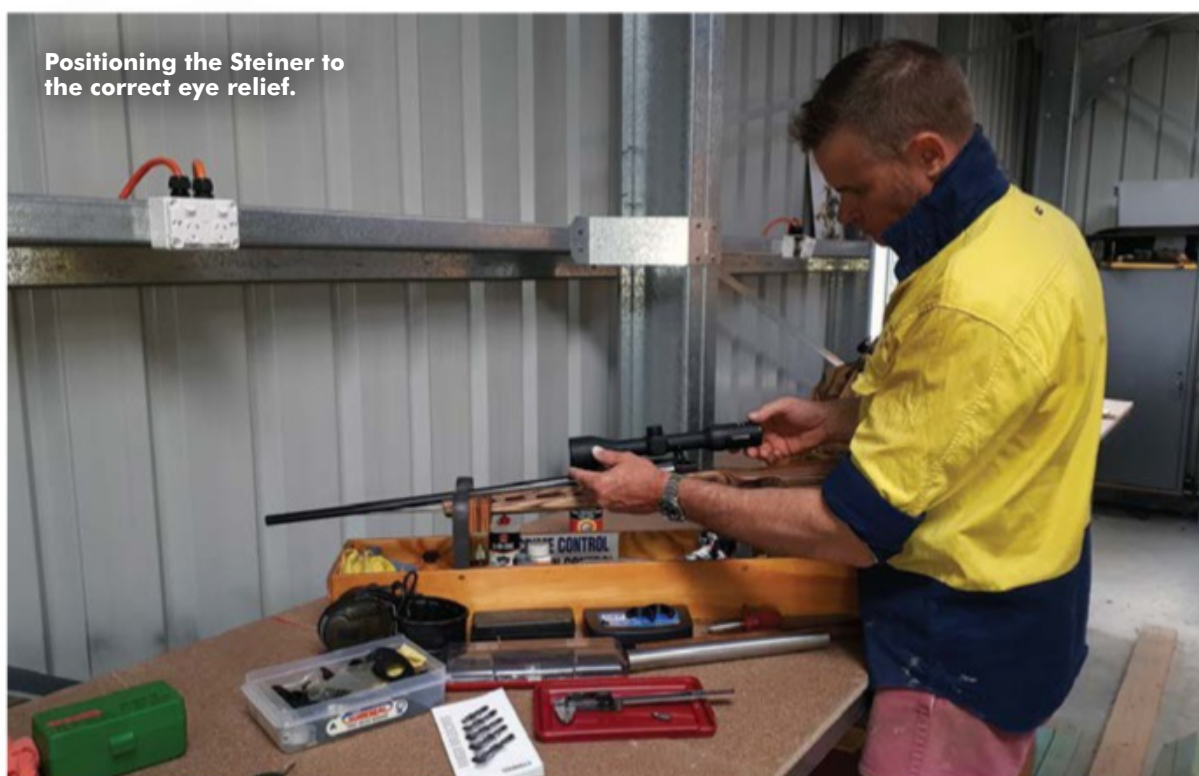
I set about mounting the Ranger to my

custom .22PPC rifle using a purpose-built machined 30mm bar to help with scope ring alignment. The Ranger has a generous 90mm eye relief and I positioned it in the rings for a clear sight picture for when shouldering offhand rapidly.

My daughter Rachel joined me for an afternoon shoot to be followed by an evening spotlight session on the same property immediately after sighting-in. I may have been a touch over confident but the Ranger didn't disappoint and took little effort to sight-in - two shots is all it needed to be on the money, with my first three-shot group hovering around an inch. My next with the IR red dot 'on' was a massive improvement to my first, nailing a ridiculous three-shot group of .167 MOA - I was now confident to take it spotlighting.

Varminting

I didn't have far to travel and all it took was to pack up my benchrest and wait for the sun to disappear before heading to the other side of the property. The recipe for good spotlighting is darkness and, right on cue, ferrets were going about their nocturnal chores - shot-for-shot the .22PPC and Ranger proved a lethal combination on hares. The optic quality of the high-contrast



The Steiner Ranger 2.5-10x50 riflescope

lens made light work of target acquisition in sub-standard lighting. Turning the IR red dot on made it even better and gave me complete confidence that where I aimed was where the bullet was going to hit.

After so much success with the Ranger in a short time on my .22PPC I didn't want to remove it but with the red deer roar less than two weeks away, I fitted it to my Brno .284 Win. As with the .22PPC, it mounted perfectly to the .284 Win and my first three-shot sighting group of .780 MOA with 150gr Nosler Ballistic Tips impressed.

Hunting

Our annual red deer hunt couldn't come quick enough and we were back at our favourite part of the world in Brisbane Valley for the roar. An unexpected deluge swept in from the west - perfect conditions to put the Ranger to the test. I found the IR red dot ideal for fast-sight acquisition in poor light - the quality of the high contrast 50mm objective lens coupled with the 30mm tube made it a breeze to cut through the conditions, so much so that in the pouring rain and bright lightning of an afternoon storm, I took a full-grown wild dog that strolled too close to camp.

The next day and with the rain cleared I nailed our one and only red stag, the scope set on 3x magnification to suit the close terrain we were hunting in. It happened fast and with just a moment to take the shot through thick scrub I'd secured a large



stag with my .284 Win, helped by the crystal clear sight picture from the Steiner Ranger.

Conclusion

I loved shooting with the Steiner Ranger 2.5-10x50 - a scope perfectly suited to the .22PPC and .284Win rifles. The added advantage of an illuminated reticle cannot be understated. The superb lenses would suffice during lowlight conditions but the IR definitely gives an edge over a non-illuminated scope when visibility is reduced.

While the scope was delivered brand new, it wasn't returned totally unscathed. The atrocious conditions of our hunt proved the ideal environment for a solid field test and it accompanied me in pouring

rain, pushing through almost impenetrable lantana gullies and up and down steep, slippery hills of mud. When the brief and only occasion presented for a shot on a stag, the scope performed faultlessly with that all-important one shot kill.

The Steiner Ranger 2.5-10x50 proved tough and reliable for both long and close-range shooting. I found it a true dual-purpose riflescope that can be mounted on either your favourite varminting or hunting rifles. An RRP of \$1769 is what you can expect to pay this is a high-quality German-made scope and I'd call that value for money. The Steiner Ranger 2.5-10x50 is backed by a 10-year mechanical and two-year electrical warranty. More at berettaaustralia.com.au ■



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The .257 Roberts

neither gone nor forgotten

John Denman



A clean kill is a great result. Note the nearby carcass of another pig shot at the same location a week before.

With newer propellants and better bullets, something old is becoming new again. Ned Roberts probably had no idea that his wildcat could end up with such a long shelf life. Most people consider the .243 Win to be the main reason for the decline in support for the .257 Roberts, but I have a sneaking suspicion that the .25-06 was the real culprit. At the very least it may have delivered the final blow.

But was there really a 'final blow'? Reaching back into the 1920s the Roberts was a pretty handy cartridge. Up to that point the .250-3000 was the best you could obtain in a 25-calibre. Being the first 'quarter bore' to reach 3000fps, it was a great cartridge. But the Roberts, with its bigger case, courtesy of an even older cartridge for the parenting job, the 7x57 Mauser, allowed heavier bullets up to 120-grain to be used.

Prolific wildcatter P. O. Ackley didn't take too long to 'improve' the Roberts with a sharper shoulder and more powder capacity. The design added maybe 100fps to some loadings but was attractive because the original Roberts, legitimised by Remington in 1934, was betrayed by feeble factory loadings that catered to a few old bolts lurking in the dim corners of various gun collections.

With today's powders and better bullets,

The .257 Roberts - neither gone nor forgotten

the Roberts has been given a new lease of life, its growing fan base often referring to it as the '.257 Bob.' It has become a real handloaders' round and those who still harbour a secret urge to have one must load for it to garner the best performance. I have to admit that I'm one of those with that desire, and although my last Roberts was the Ackley Improved version back in the 1960s, I resisted that temptation this time around.

Like its parent case, the standard Roberts has a tendency for the brass to flow forward. The Ackley Improved minimises this, but a case trimmer will fix the problem. Cases are the Achilles heel of the Roberts though, with restricted supply so you need to look after your brass. Winchester makes limited runs of production while Nosler brass, although more easily available, is incredibly expensive.

It's not hard to lose the odd case when you're hunting and seeing a grown man scrabbling around in the dirt looking for a Nosler case is demeaning. I went for the Winchester stuff. Frontier Ammunition is a Hornady spin-off, so you may find some of that around in either loaded ammo, or even as I did, once fired brass.

The Winchester brass is not annealed in production and has a tendency to split at the necks, so you really need to anneal it before you do anything else. But once you do that you will end up with good



The Roberts is flat-shooting. This three-shot group was dead-on at 100m.

brass. You should neck size the new brass after you have annealed it and chamfer the inside of the neck. I use a Lee Collet die for neck sizing. Most brass you find today will be stamped +P as well as the usual headstamp. This indicates the brass is strong enough to handle the higher loadings that allow the Roberts increased performance over the factory loaded stuff. Many 'Bob' owners have grave doubts about the need for the +P idea. After all, you can neck down 7x57 brass and nobody stamped that with a +P.



The .257 Roberts Ackley Improved version is excellent but John stayed with the original.



The action of the Montana Rifle Company is the long variety and suits the Roberts.

Most reloading data for the Roberts will often show maximums that are well below what the cartridge is safe to shoot in a modern action. This is odd because the parent case (7x57) isn't hamstrung like this, but 40,000psi is a bit on the low side of things. So work your loads up carefully.

The two powders that work best in the .257 Roberts are ADI2209 and ADI2213sc. I favour the 2209 loaded with bullets around 100 to 110 grains, but in my rifle 2213sc is better for the 117-grain bullets a lot of these rifles prefer. With careful loading

The .257 Roberts - neither gone nor forgotten

you can reach to around 2900fps with a 24" barrel with a 117-grain bullet. I also have a load that registers 3091fps at the muzzle using a 110-grain Hornady ELD-X.

With these velocities the Roberts becomes a viable big game cartridge. It was never designed to be a long-range proposition, but out to 200m a well-constructed bullet like the Hornady 117-grain SST will handle a good-sized deer, goat or pig.

My personal limit is 200m anyway when I hunt game, regardless of what I'm carrying. If greater penetration is needed, Nosler Partitions are the ideal stand-by, although so far I have yet to find the 117-grain SST lacking in penetration. Pigs are great animals to test for penetration and they have passed right through, even on shoulder shots.

You can go with lighter bullets down to around 75 grains if you must, but they lose velocity quickly and are really not much good for anything but splattering rabbits.

There's plenty of info on the various online forums about the Roberts, but be a bit careful about some of the loads that show up there. Some folks can't help themselves and like to hot-rod everything. If you lust after higher velocity than the Roberts can provide, then maybe a .25-06 is a better choice for you.

Used and loaded correctly, the Roberts is a far better performer on deer-sized game

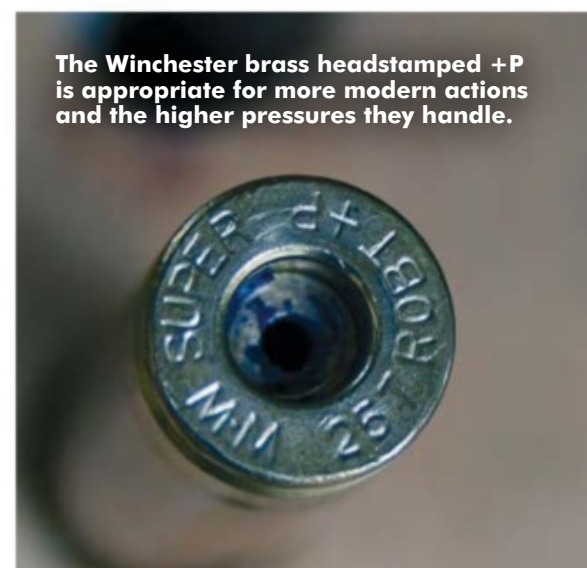


This old billy goat was shot at the same dam as John's pig by one of his mates.

than a .243. I have killed plenty of deer with a .243 and 85-grain Sierra hollow-points, but if I came across a large boar it would likely be lacking. The heavier bullet in the Roberts delivered at a respectable velocity will take out a pig with a well-placed shot. Of course, it's never going to be ideal for sambar deer because the legal minimum is .270, but plenty of red deer have succumbed to it. And in the United States, elks.

Barrel life is going to be pretty good in this cartridge, but in a hunting rifle you normally wouldn't fire enough rounds to make that an issue. The standard barrel twist is one in 10", and remember I said a 24" barrel was ideal. The perfect action for a Roberts is a medium to long action. Mine is made on a Montana ASR action that used to house a .270 barrel. Short action rifles are around, but they limit the overall length you can seat your bullets to. The short action and magazine means the bullet is seated well into the powder room, so think carefully before you pick up a used Roberts.

Most .257 Roberts rifles today are built by competent gunsmiths. Allan Swan and his son Grant did the work on mine and results have been everything I expected. A custom barrel means you can specify the length of the throat. A 3" overall length is



The Winchester brass headstamped +P is appropriate for more modern actions and the higher pressures they handle.



From the left, the three rivals: the .25-06, .257 Roberts and .243 Winchester.

ideal and makes full use of a long action. There are few factory chamberings available now, although Kimber has one and Ruger do occasional runs. This often means that many Roberts rifles are like mine - rebarrelled from something else.

The .257 Roberts is one of those rare beasts, an understated and efficient hunting cartridge that refuses to go away quietly. It is easy to shoot with light recoil that belies its effectiveness. Due to a nagging shoulder problem, my .270 Winchester was rebarrelled to the Roberts and I don't regret it for a second. Easy to load for and simple to shoot, what more can you ask?

To follow up on my earlier remarks about the .243 Win being the cause of the

The .257 Roberts - neither gone nor forgotten

Roberts slide in popularity, it may be worth considering these figures. Hornady's website says that a 100-grain Interlock from a .243 starts out at a muzzle velocity (MV) of 2960fps. By the time it reaches my 200m mark that has dropped to 2509fps and the energy is 1398 ft-lb.

The same website using the Hornady Superformance load starts a 117-grain SST out at 2945fps and at 200m that has dropped to 2478fps, a bit slower than the lighter 6mm bullet but its energy is 1595 ft-lb. That's more than 100 ft-lb extra energy. Consider too that most .243s are rifled to handle 87-grain to 90-grain bullets, and things become tougher for the .243.

I have rifles chambered for both cartridges and love each of them. But I cannot see how the .243 can really be considered the reason for the Roberts' decline in popularity. If online forums are any guide, there is a revival of interest in the .257 Roberts. Maybe that could result in brass being more available. We can only hope. ■



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A Cobourg escape

Sunrise over Raffles Bay from the bluff in front of the camp.

John Dunn

High over the waters of Beagle Gulf our charter flight out of Darwin had barely levelled off above the atmospheric haze of dry season smoke when the pilot looked hard at the control panel, a puzzled expression on his face. He twiddled with some knobs. He rapped the glass face of one gauge with a knuckle. Then he spoke quickly into the mouthpiece of his headset, his words unheard above the drone of the engine and the clutter of noise in the cabin.

The conversation went on for several minutes and when it was over the plane began to change direction, banking back towards the mainland.

I tapped the pilot on the arm and cocked an enquiring eyebrow, silently asking him what was going on as he turned to look at me.

"The air speed gauge isn't working," he said, then smiled reassuringly.

"It isn't a serious problem but we do have to go back."

After 12 months of talking and planning, Graeme Fifield and I were on our way to the Cobourg Peninsula to hunt bantengs. Our plan was to land at Smith Point – the second most northern point of mainland Australia – where we'd be met by Rob Tritten, from R&R Outfitters. Rob was guiding in the Garig Gunak Barlu

National Park for 3 Brothers Hunting Safari, an Indigenous-owned and run business venture.

By the time we returned to Darwin, changed planes and headed out again, the day was wearing down. So were we and when the aircraft finally put down on the airstrip at Smith Point we'd had enough flying for the day.

Rob was waiting for us with Solomon Cooper, owner and director of 3 Brothers. It didn't take long to organise our gear into the truck and within 20 minutes we were heading for the camp on Raffles Bay. It was dark by the time we arrived but we saw quite a few banteng bulls before the light

faded. Camp meant the end of travelling for the day, a reunion with Rob's family, a very welcome feed, the chance to catch up on what had been happening and then an early night in a comfortable bed before someone turned out the lights.

At daylight the following morning Rob, Graeme and I sat on the low bluff in front of camp and watched the sun come up, planning the days ahead. A banteng bull for Graeme was the priority, then a cow for me, perhaps a look for a sambar or maybe a buffalo bull that was bigger than anything I had taken previously. Somewhere in there we'd throw in a bit of fishing but most of all we wanted to have a good look at the country and enjoy ourselves. None of this seemed like it was going to be too hard.

We covered quite a bit of country that first morning, trying to find a banteng worth hunting. Several bulls looked the part but didn't quite measure up and we were back in camp for a delayed breakfast in the latter part of the morning.

Solomon had built the camp around two shipping containers, each divided into two lined rooms with a bed and an individual air

conditioner set in the wall – almost a necessity with the build-up to the wet season already beginning and the humidity starting to rise. At right angles to the sleeping cabins a galley kitchen was set up with an open-air eating area on a wooden deck. Behind the containers was a flushing toilet, a solar heated shower and a very quiet diesel generator.

From the bluff in front of the camp we looked out over the bay and down into the water where there always seemed to be something moving. Stingrays flapped along the edge of a weed bed, magically disappearing into the sand when they stopped and settled. A mangrove crab sidled around some rocks. A school of garfish hung in the clear water near the edge. Groups of mullet dashed about as they must to survive, followed by cruising sharks and speedy queen fish and trevally that made predatory runs among them with practised ease. A couple of hundred metres offshore what looked like a log turned out to be a 3m-plus crocodile when viewed at through the binoculars.

We rested up during the heat of the

afternoon and about 4pm headed out to Danger Point to inspect a dry paperbark swamp where Solomon said a herd of bantengs had been living. There was enough sign along the edge of the trees to say that he was right so Rob, Graeme and Solomon headed off along a meandering game trail to see what they could find.

The rest of us stayed with the vehicle, giving me the opportunity to have a wander around. There was plenty of pig sign, the marks and droppings of a lone buffalo bull and banteng sign everywhere – all of it indicating that despite the apparent dryness of the shrivelled grass it was still providing sustenance to the introduced herbivores as well as a scattering of wallabies. There were dingo tracks in the sand and on the crest of a dune the footprints and tail marks that showed where a crocodile had crossed from one side of the sandy isthmus to the other.

The hunters had been gone half an hour when we heard the wind-muffled sound of a shot. There was a pause, then two more shots in fairly quick succession before everything went quiet. A few minutes later



The airstrip at Smith Point, a remote and beautiful part of Australia even under a haze of dry season smoke.

A Cobourg escape

the radio crackled into life with directions from Rob about where to bring the vehicle. Graeme had shot a nice banteng bull.

When we arrived, the bull was set up for photographs and Graeme had a rare grin on his face. He'd obviously enjoyed the hunt and as we fussed around the animal the story came out. They had found the bull easily enough but it had taken a bit of stalking and a lot of looking before Rob decided the animal was a taker. The bull ran when Graeme shot him the first time, though he didn't go far. He had a severe case of the wobbles when Graeme shot him the second and third times - feeding him the insurance shots that weren't needed but are always necessary when dealing with animals of that size.

After we'd done the photos Rob took the head and cape and we headed back to camp for an early night. Perhaps not surprisingly we saw a couple of good bulls on the way and it was nice to look at them without any need to hunt. There was lots of talk over dinner and in the end the

decision was made that the morrow would be a fishing day.

The morning was well underway when we rolled back out to Danger Point, driving past the swamp where Graeme had taken his banteng. We headed north towards the point itself along a sandy track that more or less followed the spine of a central sand dune pushed up by the combined efforts of the wind, sea and tides over aeons of time.

On a little beach on the eastern side Rob and Solomon showed us some turtle nests, their central depressions littered with the leathery remnants of eggshells that may have hatched successfully or been dug up by predatory goannas or dingoes. There was no way of knowing but a thrill nonetheless in seeing turtles' nests for the first time. On another beach we found a slide where a crocodile had been hauling out of the water to bask on a regular basis - a timely reminder of the presence that is always there, even when you can't see them.

Danger Point itself was a weathered shelf of ancient rock jutting out into the

blue waters of the Timor Sea. Off to the north-west Sandy Island No.2 floated like a mirage on the horizon, its details hazed by distance and the shimmer of light from the water.

At our feet, the rocky edges of the point dropped vertically away. Wherever you looked down into the water there were fish feeding and moving about, some of them surprisingly large and mobile. As guests of 3 Brothers we were allowed to fish and though Graeme and Rob's kids had some success, none of my efforts came to anything.

At the end of the day it didn't matter. It was a rare privilege to be in such a remote and beautiful place where the ebb and flow of life remains relatively untouched by 40,000 years of Aboriginal habitation. It's essentially the same as it was when the first Europeans came here in the early 1800s.

On the way out we stopped to look at a sea eagle's nest then detoured over to the beach at Gul Gul. There in the mouth of a tidal creek that drained a hinterland swamp,



Graeme Fifield with his banteng bull.

Solomon showed us how his countrymen hunted for crabs among the tangled roots of the mangroves. It was an interesting way to cap off the morning before we headed back to camp to wait out the heat and humidity of the day in the blessed cool of the air-conditioned sleeping quarters.

Later in the afternoon we went in search of a banteng cow, hunting through the same area where I'd shot my banteng bull two years earlier. There was plenty of sign but no animals. The mosquitoes were as ferocious as I remembered and in the end we were glad to go back to the truck and call it a day.

We hunted for a banteng cow again the following morning and although we had a close encounter with an unwary banteng bull among the paperbarks, we came back empty handed. The only excitement we had for the outing was a crocodile slide we unexpectedly walked onto as we made our way back to the truck along the edge of a swamp. Fortunately it hadn't been recently used but yet again we were reminded of the saurians' omnipresence in this part of the world.

By the middle of the morning we were waiting on the beach for a helicopter charter that would take us over some remote country on the eastern side of Raffles Bay. By any measure it was a survey flight. Rob and Solomon wanted to know what was about and there was a chance perhaps that we might bump into a buffalo bull that was significantly bigger than the 105" animal I'd shot in Arnhem Land a couple of years previously. It was a wonderful flight and a huge thrill but when the hours had ticked away there were no big bulls to be found, but it didn't matter. There was no way it could be described as wasted time.

The diversity of birdlife on some of the swamps we flew over was fantastic – ducks and geese, ibises, jabirus, herons, cormorants, brolgas, kites and white-breasted sea eagles – all of them a living testament to the quality and importance of the Cobourg wetlands and their international recognition as Ramsar Wetlands since 1974. On ➤



Hunting on the Cobourg Peninsula

HUNTING ON THE Cobourg Peninsula is carried out under permit in the Garig Gunak Barlu National Park. Garig is the language of the Iwaidja speaking clans of Cobourg - Gunak means land and Barlu means deep blue water.

The land is jointly managed by the Northern Lands Council and the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service.

Our permit was issued to 3 Brothers Hunting Safari (3BS), an Aboriginal-owned and operated enterprise set up to generate income for the Cobourg clans, among whom all money raised from hunting is equally shared.

Our camp was set up and maintained by 3BS and owner/director Solomon Cooper, who was in camp and hunted with us for the duration of our stay.

Our hunt was booked through Rob Tritten, of R & R Outfitters. Rob is a referral outfitter for 3BS, bringing clients in and guiding them. He has more than 30 years experience of working and hunting in the area and a long association with the Cooper family.

Because the hunting is carried out under permit, there's an assortment of paperwork that needs to be processed before the hunt takes place. Apart from the hunters' details - licence numbers and registrations of the firearms to be used are also required and the cost of the hunt must be paid in advance.

Once a permit has been issued, only the animals nominated on the permit can be hunted. Animals taken – especially bantengs – are photographed and the GPS details of the site recorded. These are included as supporting documentation when the outfitter submits his hunt report at the end of the season.

Game that can be hunted includes bantengs, buffaloes and pigs. Fishing is also permitted and that includes the use of traditional methods such as a spear.

Enquiries about hunting with 3BS and R&R Outfitters can be made through:

Phone: 0429 900 390

Email: rgt375@bigpond.com ■

A Cobourg escape

the spring fed creek lines winding back into the hills there were buffaloes and bantengs, pigs and Timor ponies in country that really isn't easily accessible other than by a long hard walk. We skimmed over it all and made some memories more than enough to last a lifetime.

On our last morning in camp we sat on the bluff at daylight and watched the sun come up one more time; not talking much, just looking and listening and milking the experience for all we could. Then we packed our gear and headed up to Smith Point to meet the charter plane that would take us back to the civilisation of Darwin and the real world we'd been wonderfully removed from for the previous four days. Our Cobourg escape was over. ■



Fishing on the top edge of Australia.



Solomon Cooper fishing for crabs in the mouth of the creek at Gul Gul.

Mangrove crab on the menu.

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Natural light

Nextorch TA40 torch and hunting set

Mark van den Boogaart

The simple, quick release scope mount included in the TA40 hunting kit worked well with Mark's .22LR.

The Nextorch TA40 is a compact, well-made light-emitting diode (LED) torch with a look and feel that certainly aligns with its tactical pedigree. At just under 150mm in total length, with a 25mm diameter main barrel and a slightly larger lens unit of 33mm, it fits neatly into your hand and facilitates what I would call a natural grip. This grasp is further enhanced by a rear-mounted thumb-operated power/function button, something Nextorch refers to as its patented duo switch.

Up front the Nextorch TA40 lens unit makes use of Cree XM-L2 U2 LED with the output being described as Ultra Bright. Power is supplied from either a single,

rechargeable 18650 Lithium-ion battery or two supplied CR123A non-rechargeable batteries. As these batteries are slightly different in diameter, you also gain an adapter so you can power the TA40 with whichever batteries you prefer.

What all this brings together is one very bright torch. Output-wise the TA40 has various modes. Turbo is the brightest, at a stated 1040 lumens, with a run time of one hour and a visible distance of 285m. Sharing the same level of output is the Momentary mode, which as the name suggests is the output you obtain while keeping your thumb on the duo switch.

Below Turbo is High at 530 lumens with a 90-minute run time, Medium at 250

lumens for three hours and Low at 100 lumens for 10 hours. The TA40 also has a 1040 lumens Strobe function, and what is called a Hidden SOS function at 400 lumens that is activated by firstly turning on the TA40, then depressing the duo switch for a further five seconds.

Charging the TA40 is via a proprietary port and cable charging system that could be described as an enhanced USB system. The reason it is enhanced is that the TA40 has both a 3m drop impact rating and a 2m waterproof rating. Consequently, the connection point is rated as both submersible and hardened, so it is totally different to a standard USB or Micro USB port.

Moving to the physical characteristics of

the TA40, the torch is made from what is described as Mil-Spec grade, 1" aluminium and is finished in again, a Mil-Spec Type III hard anodised coating.

The TA40 uses a clip to secure it to your belt or shirt pocket. There are two clips points, so you can set it up to match your individual needs. The main body of the torch has +/- polarity markings. While it might not sound like much, having the markings on the outside does make changing batteries much easier in lowlight situations.

However, the standout physical feature of the TA40 is the serrated edge protruding from the lens unit. Now, it's not going to cut you, but it is designed as a point of impact, for instance to break glass, or something else with the front of the torch.

While the TA40 is available as a stand-alone torch, the review model supplied by Beretta Australia for *Australian Hunter* arrived as part of the TA40 hunting set. Along with the torch, batteries and charger you also obtain a scope mount and pressure switch. It's important to note that the hunting set also has a Picatinny rail mount option if that better caters for your needs.

The scope mount supplied is designed for 25.6-30mm scopes and will fit a torch with a diameter range of 20 to 28mm. Fitting it all to a rifle was simple, though like other torches I have had in the past I found using the pressure button a challenge.

In the end I decided to stick with the duo switch unit. Though this might sound like an issue, the way I look at it is the hunting set provides you with options to tune the torch to suit you, rather than you suit the torch, which is what you want from your hunting gear.

Overall, I like the TA40 a lot. It looks and feels like a solid, well-made torch. Furthermore, its simple ergonomic design makes it really easy to operate. Combined with the hunting set accessories, what you gain is a torch that is ideally fashioned to use in the field.

With a five-year warranty, the TA40 hunting set as reviewed has a recommended retail price of \$149. ■



Handload or factory ammunition for hunting?

Don Caswell

A chital deer taken for meat with a 110-grain Nosler AccuBond in .257 Weatherby Magnum.

Most shooters consider handloading their own ammunition at some stage. Many go ahead and do so. Competitive benchrest and long-range shooters pretty much have to roll their own, as the saying goes. For hunters, what incentive is there to take up handloading? Folks handload for one or more of the following reasons – better accuracy, preferred projectile, reduced cost, or simply fun.

Modern handloading with smokeless powders, for the calibres we still use, began in the 1920s. Developers created their own wildcat cartridges, seeking to gain better velocity and accuracy than could be achieved with the limited choices then available to recreational shooters.

Most of the drive behind handloading has been, and remains, in the US. Many calibres that are standard chamberings today began as wildcats back in the day. It was after WWII, in the late 1940s, that handloading really took off. Major technical advances from companies still prominent today and the enthusiasm of famous gun writers helped to greatly increase the numbers of shooters taking up handloading.

The driving force behind handloading in that era was the desire to obtain better accuracy and terminal ballistic performance. Projectile makers developed explosive varmint shells and controlled expansion bullets for big game, to replace the simple lead soft-points loaded into factory ammo.

Military conversions, and the few sporting rifles available, invariably required bedding and other gunsmithing to improve on their out-of-the-box inherent precision. Serious hunters and shooters looked to custom-built rifles and handloading to give them the accuracy, range and terminal ballistics that could not be found in off-the-shelf sporting rifles and factory ammo.

I have to say things have improved a lot in that regard. Subtle, on-going advancements in rifles and ammunition have reached a point where most shooters can expect to buy a rifle and achieve MOA accuracy, or better, with factory ammo. In fact, a number of manufacturers now offer a guarantee that their rifle will shoot MOA with good factory ammo.

Handload or factory ammunition for hunting?

MOA refers to Minutes of Angle, the common unit measure of accuracy. One MOA is a circle that covers one minute (that is one 60th) of one degree. The MOA size covered by a circle of fixed diameter will vary depending on how far away the circle is. At 100m the diameter of a 1 MOA circle is 29.09mm. At 100 yards (91.4m) a 1 MOA circle is 26.60mm. I find that the Aussie 20 cent piece is a good ad hoc proxy for 1 MOA group size. The 20 cent piece has a diameter of 28.65mm which means it is 1.08 MOA at 100 yards, 0.98 MOA at 100m.

What sort of accuracy do you need for hunting? That depends, but it is not as much as many shooters think. For hunters chasing medium-sized game like deer, pigs and goats, taking their shots from field positions at ranges out to 200m, an accuracy of 1.5 to 2 MOA is fine. Not many shooters, under field conditions of varying terrain, awkward position and unknown distances can shoot much better than that. Even if using a rifle that delivers 0.1 MOA off the bench at the range, it is shooter technique and the variables of the field that determine actual hunting accuracy. For varmint shooters, most likely using a bipod and a good field position, then sub-MOA would be good enough for head-shooting bunnies at 200m or taking body shots out past there.

Cases in point are my .223 Remington rifles. I have a Savage Model 11 light Sporter that happily delivers 1 MOA with Federal 55-grain soft-points. I can handload 60-grain Nosler Partitions and expect



the same precision. I can also buy factory ammo loaded with the 60-grain Nosler Partition and gain comparable accuracy. Other premium projectiles are available in factory loadings as well. My Weatherby HSP in .223 Rem will deliver well under 0.5 MOA with handloads. It also delivers 0.4 to 0.8 MOA with a variety of factory ammo as well. The Federal loading of the Nosler 55-grain Ballistic Tip shoots nicely in the

HSP, as do the Fiocchi 50-grain EPN and 55-grain soft-points and the budget-priced American Eagle 50-grain hollow-points. Additionally, I am happy with the terminal ballistics of these factory-loaded projectiles.

With a variety of .223 Rem factory ammo shooting nicely, with good terminal performance and costing from around \$0.60 to \$1.80 a round for premium projectile loadings, is it worth handloading? After 35 years



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Handload or factory ammunition for hunting?

of handloading, I am asking myself the same question. I enjoy handloading, for sure. However, I enjoy going out hunting even more and given a choice of an afternoon in the gunroom preparing and loading ammo, or an afternoon of hunting, I know what I will choose. If you plan on doing a lot of shooting, then the cost of buying reloading gear and components may well be justified. I bought the majority of my reloading gear over 35 years ago. I acquired it secondhand from an old fella who was giving up shooting. It is all still functioning perfectly and it was a long way from brand new when I purchased it.

In some calibres, reloading only small quantities of ammo can be economically worthwhile. This is more so for the less common calibres. Factory ammo for my .257 Weatherby Magnum starts at around \$5 per round. My preferred loading of the 110-grain Nosler AccuBond is both difficult to find and expensive in factory ammo, coming in at closer to \$7 per round. I can handload the 110-grain Nosler AccuBond to duplicate factory ballistics, accuracy



and point of impact, for much less than that. Likewise, when I lived in the NT and hunted buffaloes, I could duplicate premium factory loadings of calibres like the .458 Winchester Magnum, .375 H&H and 9.3x74R much more economically. A standard 20-round packet of .458 Win Mag starts at about \$5 per round, while those loaded with premium projectiles have a price more like \$13 per round.

Handloading can be fun and, depending on your circumstances, it may offer good economy. However, I feel that a lot of the incentive that drove handloading from the 1940s onwards has dissipated. Well-engineered rifles, with synthetic stocks, solid bedding systems and excellent triggers are modestly priced and can largely be expected to slide out of their



packing box and deliver the magical 1 MOA without further ado. Factory ammo is now more inherently accurate than it was decades ago and can be bought loaded with premium projectiles that a hunter may feel is best for their purposes. Adequate accuracy and desired terminal ballistics for hunting no longer demand handloading. ■



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Knife sharpening revisited

Robert Dewey



The blunt model 621 Dewey sheepfoot paring knife supplied for sharpening.

Some 10 years ago, I put together an article on the subject of knife sharpening. It was at a time when there was a lot of discussion as to what was the preferred cutting edge geometry. Diamond sharpeners were beginning to dominate the scene. Opinions were becoming replaced with facts and a lot of the mystique about knife sharpening was being resolved.

This article looks at my current technique, aimed essentially at Australian hunters and fishermen and the food preparation group. To use as an example, I will relate a recent experience where a colleague asked me to sharpen his blunt model 621 Dewey-made sheepfoot paring knife.

This design was highlighted in Edition 66 of the *Australian Hunter* magazine. The knife is made from 1.4116 stainless steel, hardened and tempered to HRC 54-56. The blade thickness is 1.5mm fashioned with flat ground bevels that meet at a cutting edge of zero thickness and finished with a barely discernible cutting edge vee.

The knife concerned had been resharpened a number of times using a pull through sharpener and, by eye, it could be seen that shoulders had formed, roughly 1/2mm in thickness – that is, his knife was seriously blunt. I explained that we would need to reset the bevels so that, once again, they met at a point of zero thickness.

Using a 25cm flat file with an industrial 600 grit diamond surface, I filed the bevels accordingly. With such a thin blade, this filing

took about five minutes. I could have used a quality standard second cut file, but the diamond gave me less work to clean up the file scratch marks.

I then used a hand-held 600 grit Eze-Lap diamond hone to form a cutting edge vee. To prepare this vee, I laid the hone flat on the bevel then raised the back of the hone approximately 3mm. I honed the edge, giving an equal number of strokes on both sides of the blade. This was continued until a feather was raised before I used the hone to buff it away. This operation took just a few minutes.

I demonstrated its sharpness using the thumbnail test - that is when pulled against the thumbnail, it bites. You have reached your maximum level of sharpness.

This process is needed in its entirety only when you have resharpened/touched up your blade many times and have developed a shoulder. At that point, a further touch up will not produce a sharp edge. This procedure is applicable for all filleting, skinning and cooking knives.

For the hunter, the knife used as the indestructible unit of the three-knife kit should have bevels to meet at a point of approximately 1/4mm thickness. This thickness is dependent upon the quality of the blade steel. For example, with a poor-quality steel blade to hold its edge, a thicker end point may be needed.

The quality of the blade will largely determine how long before a touch up or resharpening is needed. It can be as

short as after several cuts or up to six months frequent use. For example, my 621 parer, used almost every day, holds its edge for several months before half a dozen strokes with the 600 grit diamond hone are needed. After approximately 20 years of use, we have not yet produced a recognisable shoulder.

Once I had sharpened my colleague's entire kit of knives, my advice was that, apart from serrated blades, a 600 grit diamond hone was the only sharpening tool needed until a shoulder does come along. Then use can be made of a diamond or conventional file, a diamond stone or powered equipment. To remove the shoulder and re-establish flat bevels is a tedious job and the subject has been written about in previous editions of *Australian Hunter*.

I made the point to my colleague that he should use the diamond hone sparingly as they are aggressive. However, it was evident that the difference in my blade size, compared with a new blade, was barely discernible notwithstanding 20 years of service.

From this example, we can deduce a number of things:

- To put the final cutting edge vee on a knife is a simple technical exercise.
- The procedure outlined can be used on all of your knives and items such as garden tools.
- The procedure can be taught to your partner and children. The pleasure of using a knife that both holds its edge

and produces effortless cuts makes it worthwhile.

- If your choice is to use a 25cm diamond coated rod in lieu of a hand-held hone, the process is unchanged.
- The price of a 600 grit diamond hand-held hone is about \$25 and, for the casual hunter and domestic chef, this item will be effective for approximately five years. If using a 25cm diamond rod, it will be operative for more or less 20 years.
- Leaving aside the period to remove a shoulder and reshape the bevels, the usual time to touch up the vee is about five minutes.
- The difficulty with shoulders has not changed. A user will raise a shoulder after repeated re-sharpenings irrespective of using hand-held equipment or a pull through type machine. If not removed, your knife will be blunt.



- The quality of your edge sharpness is almost totally dependent upon bringing your bevels near to or zero at the point of meeting and prior to honing the cutting edge vee. However, how long this sharpness lasts depends upon the

quality of your blade steel and its heat treatment.

At all times, keep it simple, recognise and follow the few key points. You will then enjoy the use of your knives and their upkeep. ■

Stick it to 'em

The Van Diemen's Land Pig Sticker

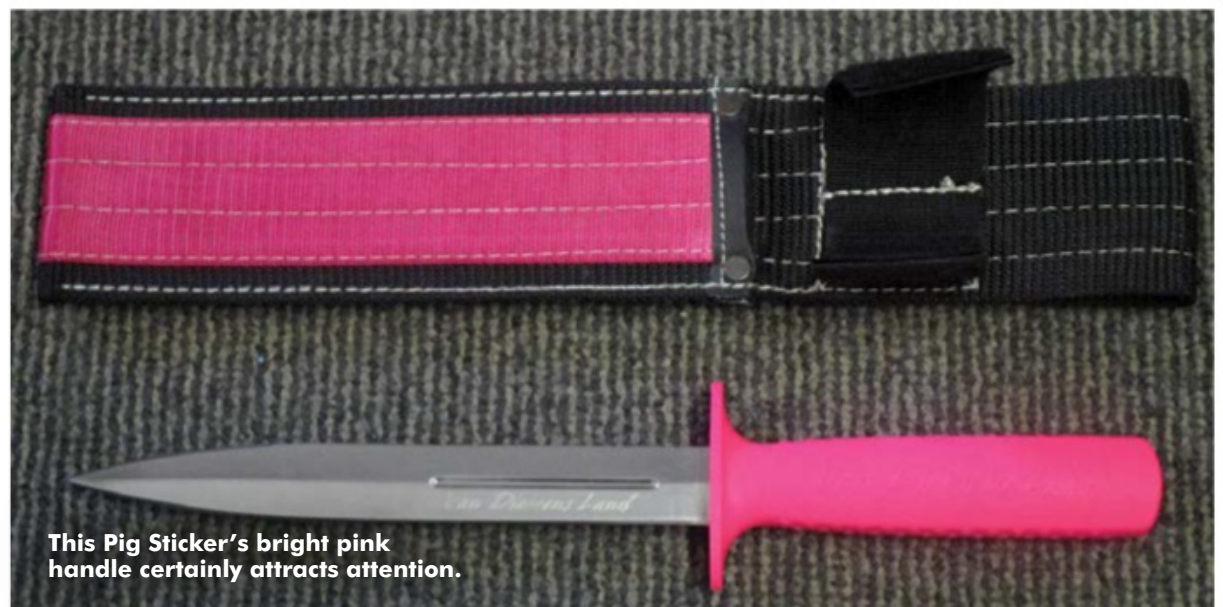
Lynn Bain

Australian Hunter magazine was provided with a Van Diemen's Land Pig Sticker by the Max Force Tactical store in Brisbane.

Along with the pink, colour options include yellow, orange, glow in the dark (halo), blue, purple/violet, lime and zombie. RRP is \$100 but you will find them discounted down to about \$85. Incidentally, the sheath by itself is available for \$25 to \$30.


Made from polypropylene with a stippled pebble finish for better grip, the brightly coloured handles make the knives easy to find if misplaced. There is a blood groove on each side of the 8"/198mm 440 stainless steel blade, which has a full-length cutting edge on one side and a 40mm long edge on the other side at the tip.

Overall the knife is 337mm long and the boxed knife comes with a matched



snug-fitting brightly coloured heavy-duty nylon web belt sheath that is 367mm long and 73mm wide. The solid sheath has a belt loop that easily accommodates belts up to 50mm wide. Stitched with heavy duty nylon thread, doubled stitched where appropriate,

and riveted, this web belt sheath with its bright 'notice-me' colour patch on the outside, is ideal for ambidextrous use. The handle is secured in the sheath by a 50mm velcro buckle. Contact Max Force Tactical on (07) 3855 2574. ■



Thommo took this porker down with a single shot from his new Tikka T3x stainless/synthetic in .30-06.

A solitary swine signals the end of an era

Ben Unten

Geoffrey Chaucer is credited with coining the phrase: "All good things must come to an end."

So, to get my Shakespeare on: "Ne'er hath a truer word been spoke," especially when it came to accessing my 'jewel in the crown' deer hunting property.

This place had a bit everything - rabbits, foxes, deer, comfortable quarters, plus a super-friendly and amenable owner with whom I became firm friends. After more than a decade of great memories coupled with successful trips - I think we only ever missed out on deer twice: once after a sanctioned chopper shoot and once more this trip - I heard from the owner that the property had been sold. This was to be our last outing.

It was with more than a hint of sadness my hunting partner Thommo and I unpacked the utes, set up camp and readied our gear.

But moping wasn't going to bag us any game, so we patched our rifles, loaded up and set off. We parked about 1 km from our favourite dam, performed a final gear check, donned our packs and embarked on our last hunt.

We made it to the dam without incident and picked our ambush locations as we had countless times before. After more than 90 minutes of seeing nothing more than the odd kangaroo and occasional bird, I was beginning to wonder if we might go home empty-handed this one last time. But then as if it had simply risen out of the ground, a pig appeared at the edge of the dam. I'm constantly amazed at how, despite two sets of eyes constantly scanning, animals can just 'appear' in the open, away from any cover. I'm forever wondering: "How did that get there?"

Thommo had the rights to first shot and I watched him settle in behind the butt of his new Tikka T3x stainless/synthetic in .30-06.

After what seemed like an eternity the shot rang out and the pig spun once on the spot, twitched a couple of times then lay forever still.

We grabbed a few snaps and made our way back to camp for the final time. I couldn't help but feel a touch disappointed we didn't bag a deer on that last trip, only because it would have been perhaps a more fitting end. But I couldn't complain, I'd had more than my fair share of deer over the years.

When morning came, we broke camp, bid our final farewell to the owners and headed for home. Alexander Graham Bell once said: "When one door closes, another opens." So who knows, maybe my next invite is just around the corner, and a new era can begin.

But the moral of the story remains: never take access to a good hunting property for granted. ■

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Dream catcher

art imitates life in Africa

Mick Chapman



Markus, from *Down Under Taxidermy*, films wildlife congregating at a waterhole near the accommodation.

August 2008 was somewhat of a watershed month for me. I was about to embark on my first trip to the Dark Continent. Years of reading other hunting exploits, on this land time had forgotten, helped augment my dream hunts into reality. All the planning and organising of airline tickets, booking outfitters, firearm export and import permits was behind me as our team of five men walked into Brisbane domestic airport.

As with most hunters who venture to Africa, the 'grey ghosts of the veldt' or kudu was my primary objective. Though, to this hunter, not just any bull would do. It had to be special, more than 50 inches long with three twists to each ivory-tipped horn, plus a better-than-good cape. I was prepared to go without, if my bull did not materialise.

Arriving at Bulawayo, we were escorted to our outfitter's property and given a quick

debrief, explaining the logistics of our hunt, before settling into our accommodation. Lloyd and Steve departed for another property, Bruce, Markus and I stayed put. After sighting our rifles and with daylight fading, we had an unexpected commencement to our hunt. A nice kudu bull was spotted. Bruce soon despatched it; after some back slapping and photos, our first day was over. The next couple of days flew by. At the end of it, a number of animals had been taken but no more kudus.

African hunting is different to what we're used to, opportunistic by nature, due to the variety of species available. Africa has a wonderful abundance of big game of which the variety is truly breathtaking. Animals that we had never seen or heard of were now being added to our lists. Our tallies were escalating but true to their sobriquet, the 'grey ghosts of the veldt' kudu had

remained a figment of my imagination.

From here we moved to another property new to our outfitter and generally reserved for upmarket American hunters. It was exclusive, a wonderful display of opulence, making us feel quite pampered. The property was situated high above the veldt on a vast kopje, overlooking a waterhole frequented by significant numbers of wildlife. The individual rooms each had a waterfall as a shower. Not what I was expecting but looking back, it was a nice once-off experience.

I still hadn't connected with a kudu as we moved from our opulent surrounds to an unpretentious bush camp on the Buby Valley Conservancy. The Buby Valley Conservancy is well known for its rehabilitation of lion numbers through the efforts of hunters. Once again, game was plentiful but my dream kudu remained elusive.

Having passed on a number of bulls, while my hunting partners had harvested some beautiful kudus, made me question my own sanity. The guide suggested my sights maybe set a trifle high, but I stood firm.

Another change of hunting location saw us on a Northern Zimbabwe property, which was committed to lion conservation with breeding stock in a large enclosure below our quarters. The resonances of an African primeval symphony was heard as the kings of beasts heralded the dawning and passing of each day.

Day 13 of a 14-day hunt rolled by, without me managing to connect with a kudu. In desperation my guide located a waterhole that had obviously been frequented by a large-footed kudu. Our only hope was large feet would equate to large horns. A ground blind was quickly built; the waiting game began.

I sat motionless for a couple of hours as my guide read a book, *Months of the Sun* by Ian Nyschens. (One of the best African hunting books I have read and I highly recommend it). I sat, with camera in hand, photographing the wildlife. A nature call had me standing when I caught a glimpse of a distant mob of four kudu bulls meandering toward the waterhole. Sitting down, I instantly forgot nature as we watched the bulls approach.

One bull was a standout, with magnificent ivory-tipped horns spiralling more than 50-plus inches above his head with an



The five hunters standing under the monument to David Livingstone at Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.



Mick's favourite photo of his kudu was sent to artist Lyn in the hope she could capture the essence of the moment.



Mick's wife Roz with the amazing artwork that provided him with a trophy of a different kind.

Dream catcher - art imitates life in Africa

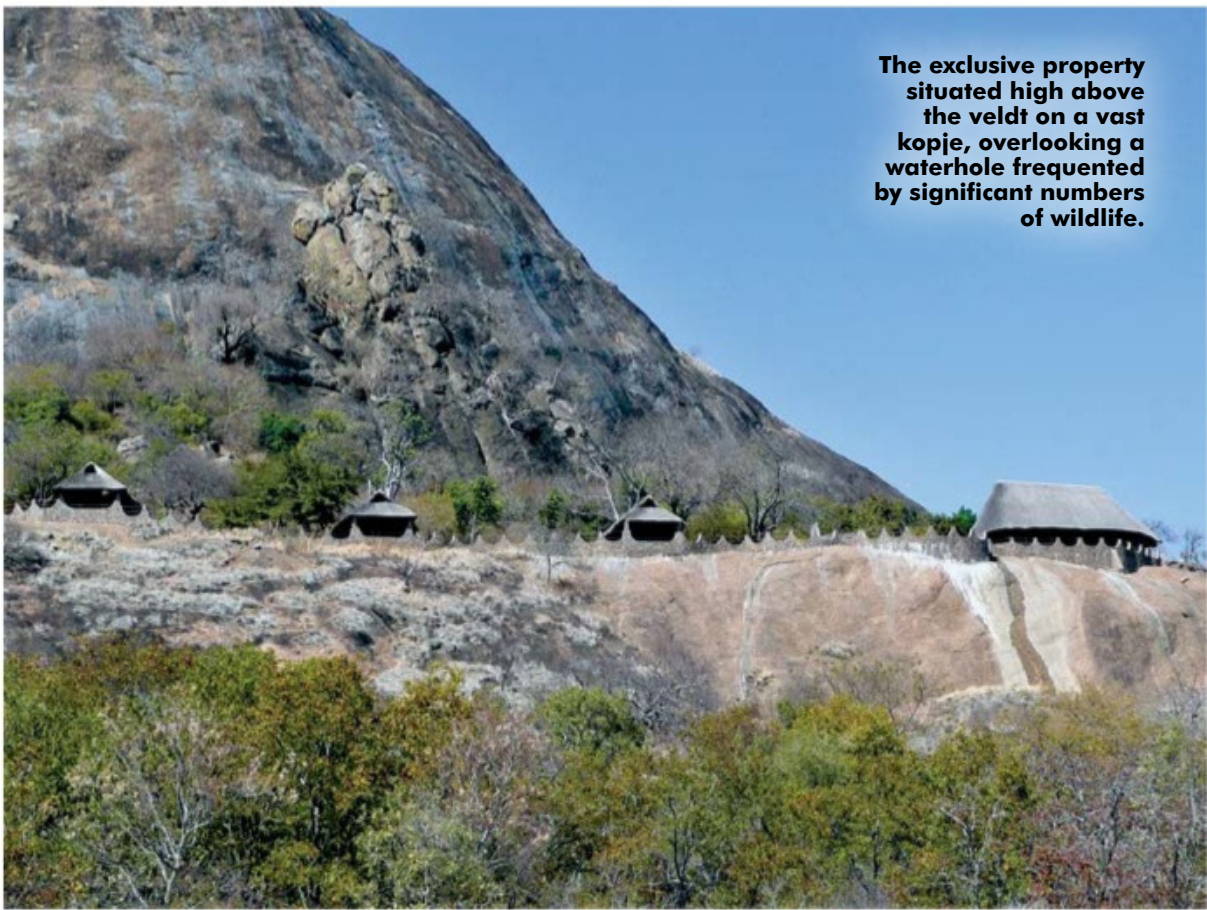
exaggerated spread and a beautiful grey face with striking white chevron. The bull of my dreams had arrived. My anticipation grew as the bulls closed in on the waterhole. This was my moment, the moment my dreams were to be fulfilled.

Once the bulls had relieved their thirst, my quest for a kudu bull was over. A magnificent bull had been taken with one well-placed shot. I was ecstatic, the last day of my hunt for a kudu had come to a successful conclusion. The feeling of exhilaration for the hunt remained for months. Though, unbeknown to me, this was the beginning of a roller coaster ride over the full gamut of emotions.

Months passed as we waited for the arrival of our trophies from the Zimbabwean taxidermist. Markus, my mate and taxidermist, rang to inform me he was travelling to Brisbane to pick up our trophies. He asked if I would accompany him and lend a hand. By mid-afternoon we were back at Markus' eagerly unpacking three rather large crates containing our trophies.

At first it was like being kids at Christmas, sorting through crates, setting up five different piles of presents, one for each member of our team. Any item marked with my name was quickly unwrapped for a squiz. An eland, blue wildebeest, giraffe, baboon, steenbok, klipspringer and impala, but no kudu. We kept unpacking, anticipating my kudu must be in the next crate or down the bottom. Finally all crates were unpacked. But not my kudu trophy.

My disappointment was crushing, with me checking and re-checking. There was a spare



The exclusive property situated high above the veldt on a vast kopje, overlooking a waterhole frequented by significant numbers of wildlife.

set of kudu horns packed but they were diminutive by comparison to the bull I had shot. My kudu had measured 53 inches, the spare head was 46 inches. Markus contacted the taxidermist in Africa but was unable to garner any sense from him.

Still holding hope I rang the taxidermist and spoke to him directly, quickly coming to the conclusion that this man had no intention of righting the wrong. He refused point blank to take responsibility for, in my eyes, a monumental foul up, blaming the outfitter for incorrect delivery. I know my outfitter delivered the correct horns, I was with him when he delivered my trophy kudu. My dreams of a kudu trophy were fast fleeting.

Disappointment often turns to acrimony but my life is too short for such wasted emotions. I had to overcome the disappointment the best way I could. While talking to my wife Roz, she suggested I go back to Africa. With her endorsement, I bit the bullet and organised another hunting trip, this time to Namibia with Roz accompanying me - specifically to hunt kudus.

My Zimbabwean kudu had measured 53 inches. I now set the bar higher, wanting a 56-incher. Ensuring most of my Namibian hunt would be spent chasing kudus, some might say I was obsessed.

My Namibian outfitter busted his gut to find a bull in excess of 56 inches. We had seen one on our first day but were unable



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Dream catcher - art imitates life in Africa

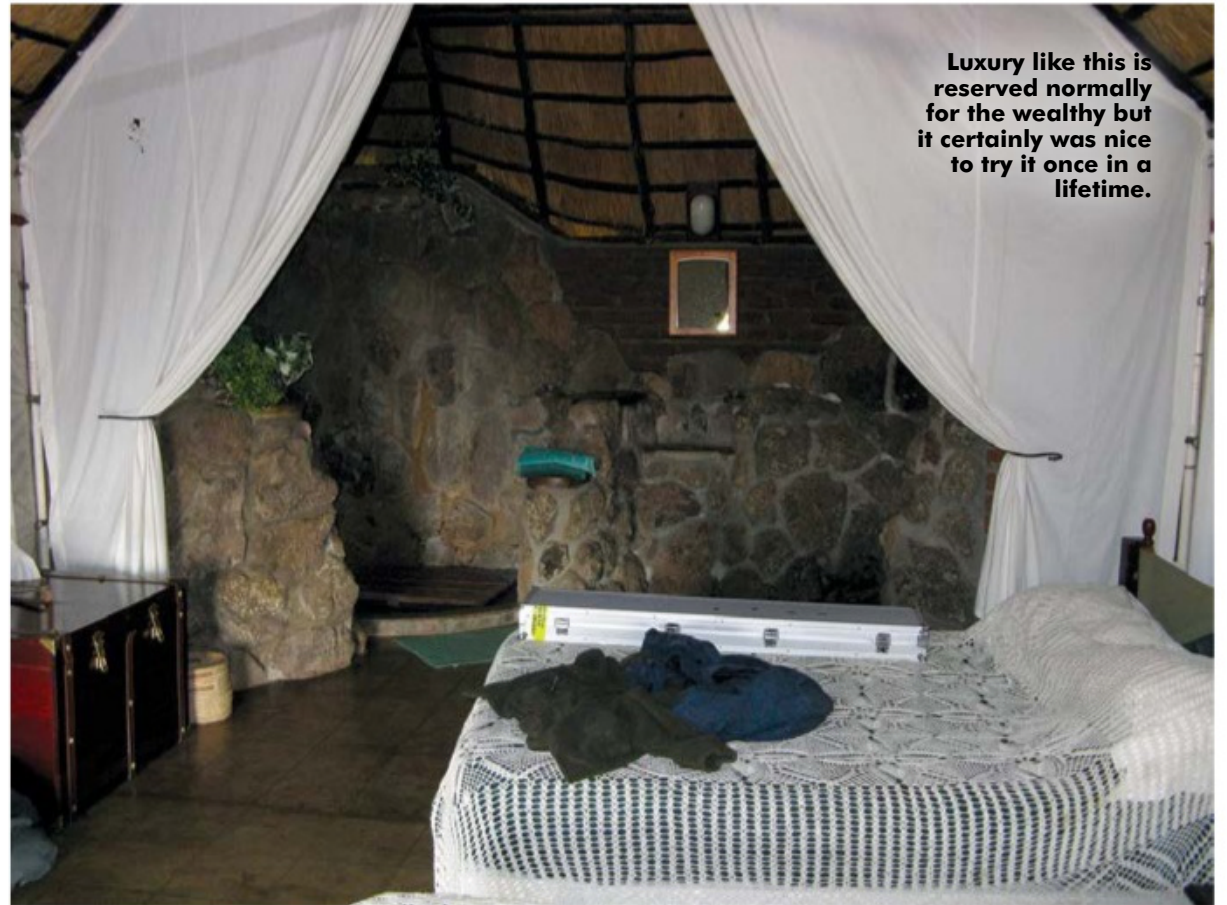
to connect with it. Our chase had been relentless. We spent days in the hot African sun, climbing kopjes and tracking this elusive kudu. During the last hours of sunlight, of an extremely hot afternoon, we pulled up a stump, mid hunt. Suddenly two kudu bulls materialised from the bush, one looking very much like the magnificent specimen we had seen a couple of days prior. Our window of opportunity was tiny so a hasty decision was made to shoot the larger of the animals.

Once on the ground it became very apparent an error of judgment had been made; this was not the animal we had been hunting. Drikus, my guide, quickly accepted responsibility saying there was no need to pay for the animal. It was a beautiful animal in its own right but it wasn't the animal we had been chasing. To me it seemed a terrible waste and I said so. Drikus then offered me the trophy at half price.

I looked around to my wife for support, her face flush from heat and the exertion of the chase, it was plain to see she had had enough. Without consulting Roz, I accepted the offer. Once home in Australia I began to regret that impetuously made decision.

My kudu had become a journey of crushed dreams.

Rewinding the clock back to my arrival home from Zimbabwe, I had had a large collage printed of photos of the many facets of my hunt. Throughout the years the disappointment of not receiving the correct kudu head had mellowed somewhat. But occasionally my regrets would bubble to the top as I pondered the collage with my



magnificent kudu so prominent. My failure to acquire the kudu of my dreams, spread over two trips, hung heavily. So close but to be denied my objective by a quirk of fate, made the memories of my African sojourns bitter sweet medicine.

Like many these days I use Facebook to stay in touch with other hunters and I noticed a member displaying a photo of an oil painting of himself next to a very nice deer. The painting had been done by another member's wife, Lyn Turnbull. Soon, another painting appeared and low and behold I knew the subject - Ted Mitchell Snr, having hunted with him prior to my African excursions. The likeness was uncanny, the painter obviously had talent

and I wondered if the painter could capture the essence of my dream.

I remember saying to myself, "Be careful here, you already have a very large emotional and financial investment in this kudu." Having some very good photos from when he was shot, did I really need to expend more money on my now ephemeral dream? I mulled it over, discussed it with my wife, then mulled it over some more. When I shot this animal my plans were clear, a shoulder mount to take pride of place in my hut.

The question I kept asking, "Could Lyn truly be my 'dream catcher' by painting my kudu well enough to take pride of place in my hut?" After much deliberation I contacted

An advertisement for NYATI Hunting Supplies. The top section features a kudu head and the text "OPEN 7 DAYS" and "NYATI Hunting Supplies". Below this is the address "Sporty's Warehouse, 32 Strathaird Rd Bundall QLD" and contact information: "p: (07) 5531 6511", "fax: (07) 5504 5357", and "email: sales@nyati.com.au". The website "www.nyati.com.au" is also listed. The bottom section shows various hunting equipment including a rifle, binoculars, a bow, a knife, and a boot. An Instagram logo is present with the text "follow us @nyati_hunting_supplies".

Dream catcher - art imitates life in Africa

John Turnbull, Lyn's husband, commissioning Lyn to do a painting - only to be told that Lyn had just been contracted to paint the illustrations for a new book and would not be available for some months. My dream had been over a decade in the making so what was another couple of months?

Finally my day of reckoning had arrived, my painting was here and my wife was as excited as I was as I carefully unpacked my painting. Roz looked at the painting for a few seconds and then blurted out, "That is exquisite." I had to agree but I am not sure "exquisite" gives the painting full justice.

My dream of a kudu bull had many twists and turns before becoming a reality. Who would have guessed when I began my kudu odyssey that I would be satisfied with a painting in place of my trophy? I am. Lyn has done an astounding job, so much so she has now become my dream catcher. More than anything, the painting has brought me much needed closure. ■



Mick with a nice warthog taken while in pursuit of a kudu.



The waterhole opposite Mick's digs.



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Bedding a CZ

Ben Unten

My CZ in .22 Mag, warmly referred to as the 'Sleazy' (as in the American pronunciation of Z = 'Zee') has only ever had average accuracy. I know most CZs have a well-deserved reputation for accuracy way beyond their price tag, but for whatever reason mine has struggled to group consistently.

As part of 'Project Sleazy', I've done all the usual things - a thorough clean with Sweets 7.62 solvent, checked and retorqued all the screws with my FAT wrench, changed scopes, had the bore inspected and tried virtually every brand of ammo on the market without any significant success.

It will group well for maybe four/five shot groups, then the fifth group has fliers and is frankly horrible. Being a stubborn so-and-so, I resolved to try one more thing - bedding it. I knew enough to realise that bedding is quite an involved process and if things go wrong they can go badly wrong, but I was at the point of no return.

So I did my research, which involved spending many moderately torturous hours watching online videos, that largely consisted of literally watching paint (or in this case bedding compound) dry.

Eventually I felt I had enough knowledge to have a lash and managed to convince a mate of mine, Aaron, to give me a hand. I had decided to use a two-part epoxy

Plasti-Bond, which is not a particularly good bedding compound, but was inexpensive and I've worked with it before.

We removed the action from the stock and marked with a Sharpie the areas we wanted to relieve. I selected the tiny sanding drum attachment for my Dremel and began to remove material. The hard part is knowing how much to remove because once you've got rid of your Sharpie marks you've no way of knowing what the height of the stock was before you started. A trick here is to cut a couple of slots or grooves in the timber at the depth you'd like to finish at, then remove the sections between these grooves. We opted for around 2mm-3mm deep.

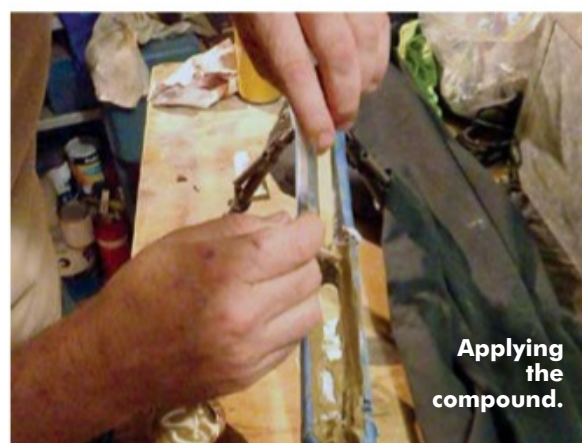
Once that was done, I cut another couple of slots to give the compound something to bite into. Finally we chose to remove some material from the fore-end under the stock to increase the clearance. This would be sealed with varnish later to protect it. We taped up the exterior of the timber stock with low-tack masking tape, we taped inside the fore-end with duct tape in case of leakage, and filled the magazine slot with plasticine. We then taped up the underside of the action, including the take-down screw as we would be installing and tightening this screw to act as the 'clamp' to hold the rifle in the stock.

Finally we liberally coated the action and barrel in boot polish to act as our release agent. We placed the action into the stock and tightened the take-down screws. There was a small amount of 'ooze' which we cleaned up and left it to harden for 24 hours.

The next day, we had a few tense moments as the stock was reluctant to let go of the action and all the online horror stories relating to actions being permanently fixed into stocks ran through my head. However we were eventually able to wiggle it out. The result was not as smooth and visually pleasing (the red bits are discolouration from the boot polish) as I had hoped for.

We hadn't used quite enough compound so there were some voids within the filler, but overall it looked sufficient to be able to test the rifle to see if it would make a difference. A few final touch-ups with the Dremel and after cleaning up the action to remove the polish, we reinstated the action and torqued up the screws ready for testing.

I am pleased to say that it did have a positive impact on consistent accuracy. It did not make my CZ the tack-holder that I'd witnessed in some of the online clips, but it did seem to reduce the variation between groups and the spread of fliers. Overall it was a success and I can now put the Sleazy project to rest. ■



Game meat Asian style

Paul Barker converts his old five-burner barbecue into the ultimate backyard Asian kitchen and serves up three tantalising dishes



The 12-volt high intensity LED light strip illuminates the cooking area efficiently.

A few hours work removed years of built-up cooking residue while the metalwork looked quite respectable given its age.



Asian food has been a long-time favourite in our household. Rarely a week would pass that would not find me and my wife at one of our local Chinese restaurants. Being within easy walking distance from home, we could enjoy a glass of wine with our meal. Unfortunately over a period, the restaurants either closed or changed owners and the food quality went downhill compared to what we had become accustomed to. After sampling the cuisine at various other restaurants, all of which we had to drive to, it was decided that we should try our hand at home prepared Asian food.

After a qualifying number of attempts with mixed results, it soon became obvious that our domestic gas stove was fairly inadequate in terms of heat output, as stir-frying vegetables turned out more like stewed offerings. Meanwhile, deep-frying various meat dishes took far too long, requiring several batches to be done in sequence with sufficient time intervals to allow the cooking oil to come back up to temperature.

The stove issue triggered a chain of events that led to the creation of the 'backyard Asian kitchen'.

The hunt began to find a suitable wok burner that was able to generate significantly more heat than our kitchen stove. An hour

or two on the internet turned up what looked like an ideal solution - a Rambo 55MJ/H high output stand-alone wok burner, model HPA100LPB. Fortunately there was a YouTube video showing the product in action, along with the specifications. After reading a couple of reviews, all of which were very positive, I went ahead and ordered one online from a Sydney supplier.

Returning home from a hunting trip a weighty parcel was waiting. In no time at all the parcel was unpacked, revealing an awesome looking item of cookware. Carefully reading through the instructions it was noted that it must be used outdoors and have significant clearance from any nearby structure, testament to the amount of heat generated when in use.

The Rambo weighs 6.7kg so a fairly substantial work space would be required to set it up on. As luck had it, we had an old five-burner covered barbecue that was destined for the next council bulk rubbish pick-up. The hardwood frame was in reasonable condition as was the enamelled steel chassis and roll down oven cover. All of the hot components had rusted to a point where it was unusable.

The restoration job began by gutting out all of the gas related components with just the chassis, cover and the timber frame remaining. A few hours work removed

years of built-up cooking residue while the metalwork looked quite respectable given its age. The timber frame responded well to a thorough sanding and after several coats of clear acrylic lacquer looked like new.

A suitable sized sheet of 18mm thick marine ply was cut to size to form the in-fill benchtop inside the chassis. This was also given several coats of clear lacquer. At this stage the plan was to retain the roll down oven top, the logic being that it was enamelled to handle a reasonable amount of heat. In the event that it did overheat it was a simple task to just lift it off the main chassis when the wok was in use.

To increase the clearance between the wok and the oven top a small removable extension was constructed, which allowed the burner to be located right to the front edge of the benchtop with the controls sitting on the extension. This also increased the head room to make it easier to manipulate the wok.

To illuminate the work area when cooking at night, a 1m-long strip of high intensity LEDs were mounted in a length of aluminium angle with two sections of flat bar attached at right angles. These in turn fitted into two sections of sail track mounted on the roll top hand rail. This system allowed some adjustment in lighting angle and can simply be removed when not required - a

Game meat Asian style

small 7A/h battery will power the LEDs for about six hours between charges.

The Rambo instructions also stated that it had to be located on a non-combustible surface. A stainless steel circular tray also came in the box. This was placed on a large floor tile that gave extra protection to the plywood benchtop, and judging by the heat pattern on the tray the tile is certainly required.

The moment of truth came with the first trial run of the new set-up. The Rambo lived up to expectations heat wise, as it has step-less heat adjustment and at full heat consumes 1 kg of gas an hour. It roars like a jet engine, very similar to what you see and hear in Asian restaurants.

At one stage along the way, a second Rambo was considered based on the cooking times we had experienced with the house gas stove. The initial dishes cooked on the Rambo soon demonstrated that we only require the one. With rapid heat changes, deep-frying meal sized meat components was quick and precise and stir-fried vegetables took on a whole new appearance and taste.

While on the subject of deep-frying, different types of meat/chicken spring rolls to name a few, require different oil temperatures. Some folk gauge oil temperatures by placing a wooden chopstick in the oil, observing how long it takes for minute bubbles to form around the chopstick. A more precise method is to use a digital thermometer to monitor oil



Close-up of the take-down bench extension.



The incredible Rambo wok burner in position on its non-combustible stainless steel tray and floor tile.

temperatures taking the guesswork out of this sometimes critical aspect of deep frying.

After additional experience using the new outdoor kitchen a sheet of stainless steel was added to the benchtop, making it more durable and easier to keep clean. Also the fold up/down benchtops on either end of the chassis may at some stage be extended for extra space for the many items that gravitate to the area while cooking. A small sink and tap connected to the garden hose could be added if a need arose.

We chose to use two woks, both made from carbon steel. The first is a slightly heavier flat-bottomed version that has become our choice for deep frying and has the temperature probe for the Maverick digital thermometer set up on it. The second wok is a lighter round-bottomed version that is used for stir frying. Having the two

woks saves having to swap out the cooking oil between different cooking requirements. Both woks were properly seasoned in the beginning to create a non-stick surface. This was achieved by rotating the wok over high heat so that the entire surface turned a dark blue/grey colour after which three coats of peanut cooking oil was applied sequentially, again over high heat.

A visit to the local Asian grocery store to purchase a selection of wok related utensils pretty much completed the project. It's a pleasure to use in combination with an orderly work flow utilising the required ingredients lined up in order of need to prepare the meal.

A timely word of caution - the Rambo wok burner can reach extremely high temperatures when in use and being situated in a fairly exposed environment it should not be left unattended, particularly where young children and pets are likely to come into contact. Inquisitive dogs and cats could cause all manner of issues, particularly with exceptionally hot cooking oil. A fire blanket or appropriate fire extinguisher nearby would not be out of place.

Overall the exercise in building the outdoor kitchen has been well worthwhile and certainly makes preparing Asian-style dishes far easier than in the house kitchen. When not in use the whole thing packs up into a compact unit and can be wheeled to any convenient location in the backyard. ■



Project complete, with the outdoor kitchen ready to go.

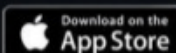
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Rabbit and bacon spring rolls



Experimenting with various types of food and the manner that it is prepared can be a tasty culinary pastime. Hunters in Australia have the opportunity to harvest a wide range of game, taking the time to properly dress the assets in the field and returning home with a car fridge loaded with meat can lead to some interesting dishes.

The humble rabbit is one example that has found its way onto many Australian tables at meal time, dating back from when they were introduced a century or two back. Being fortunate to have access to a couple of properties that have fluctuating rabbit populations, it's generally not too difficult to shoot a few to bring home for the table.

Having an increasing interest in preparing Asian-style foods and on returning home from a recent hunting trip with a number of rabbits in surprisingly good condition, given the severe drought conditions the area was suffering, it seemed logical to have an attempt at preparing a rabbit dish with an Asian twist.

Spring rolls are a popular starter with many Chinese meals and so it was that rabbit and bacon seemed like a delicious

combination to experiment with to see what we could create.

To begin the preparation the rabbit was cut into pieces, back and front legs and the spine sliced in half. These were placed into a bowl containing salted water along with half a cup of black rice vinegar and left to marinate for about three hours.

Once out of the marinade the rabbit was thoroughly dried with a paper towel and the meat cut from the bones into matchbox-sized pieces. The last stage in preparing the rabbit was to run the meat through a mincer. This produced an even textured mince ready for the main preparation with the other ingredients.

Ingredients

- One whole full-grown rabbit
- Three rashers of smoky bacon
- Half a red capsicum
- Three heaped cups of diced cabbage
- One large carrot
- Two shallots
- Two cloves of garlic
- A thumb-sized piece of fresh ginger
- One egg
- Spring roll pastry
- Light soy sauce
- Oyster sauce
- Fish sauce
- Pine sugar
- Sesame oil
- Sweet chilli sauce



Three well-conditioned rabbits destined for the table.

Method

Slice the bacon into matchstick-sized pieces and combine with the rabbit mince in an appropriately sized bowl and add one tablespoon of light soy sauce, one teaspoon of sesame oil and a light sprinkle of sugar. Set aside while the other ingredients are prepared.

Finely chop the garlic cloves, ginger and the white ends of the shallots.

Cut or julienne the carrot into thin strips and cut the cabbage and red bell pepper into 4/5mm wide strips.

To prepare the sauce combine two tablespoons each of the oyster sauce and fish sauce along with one level tablespoon of palm sugar and mix well. Now the fun cooking bit starts.

Bring the wok or non-stick pan to a high smoking heat and add two tablespoons of peanut or canola oil. Swirl the oil to cover the surface of the wok/pan and add the rabbit and bacon meat. Reduce the heat a little and stir fry until nicely browned and there are no clumps in the mince. Once cooked, remove the mince to a plate but retain the meat juices in the wok. Add the garlic, ginger, shallots and stir fry for about 45 seconds over medium heat. Next, increase the heat and add the vegetables and stir fry quickly for a minute or so. Then return the meat to the wok along with the previously prepared sauce. Mix and combine well.

Turn off the heat and add the green parts of the shallots and combine, to complete this part of the preparation. Place the mix into a strainer to remove all of the excess moisture. If the mix has too much moisture, it can cause the spring roll pastry to split when frying and allow the cooking oil into the mix. Before advancing to actually putting the spring rolls together, allow the mix to completely cool and drain.

With the spring roll pastry defrosted, place a sheet on the bench with the corners perpendicular. Place a heaped tablespoon on the mix about a third of the way up the pastry. Form the mix



Rabbit meat makes ideal mince for spring rolls.



The prepared ingredients ready for stir frying.



Rabbit and bacon spring rolls

into a cylinder shape and bring the bottom corner over the mix and tuck it under so the pastry is a firm fit around the mix.

Next, roll the mix up to about halfway, keeping the pastry tight as it is rolled and then tuck the ends in and over the first wrap to form an envelope shape. Finally, paint the exposed pastry with beaten egg to seal the completed spring roll.

Now it's back to the wok. Bring approximately 300ml of cooking oil to about 180 degrees Centigrade. Initially the oil temperature will drop as the spring rolls are added. For best results adjust the heat to maintain the oil temperature between 160 and 170 degrees Centigrade. The cooking oil temperature is fairly critical in that if it is too low the spring rolls will be rather oily, too high and the pastry will burn before the contents have enough time to heat through. A suitable thermometer is handy to monitor the oil temperature, allowing the heat to be adjusted to maintain the correct temperature through the five-minute deep frying.

If the free-floating spring rolls tend to cook faster on the underside as they often do, reduce the oil level so they just contact the bottom of the wok sufficiently to prevent them from rolling back over once they have been turned. This should result in them being evenly browned.

If the whole process has gone to plan, lovely golden-brown crunchy spring rolls should arrive at the table with whatever garnish and dipping sauce you choose. Light soy and or sweet chilli sauce go well, along with pickled ginger. ■



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Spicy Szechuan venison



For most of the year we are fortunate to have a good quantity of venison in the freezer in various cuts - fillet, rump and backstrap being our favourites. Over time we have prepared and cooked venison in what may be described as traditional ways with pleasing results. Our recent interest in Asian-style cooking has us enjoying the experience of trying the vast selection of spices and cuisine methods that go into this form of tasty food presentation.

On a number of occasions we had enjoyed Szechuan beef and chicken at local Chinese restaurants, so why not try Szechuan venison at home? The kitchen

pantry is well stocked with an ever-increasing range of Asian spices and sauces and the refrigerator crisper with a good selection of vegetables, so assembling and cooking the dish should be pretty straightforward.

To start the preparation, the Szechuan peppercorns have to be roasted in a suitable pan over medium heat for about five minutes, then allowed to cool. This done, they need to be ground to a fine powder in a spice grinder or with mortar and pestle.

As with most Asian-style wok prepared dishes it pays to have the entire ingredients ready ahead of time as the actual cooking is quite fast for best results.

Ingredients

- About 300 to 400 grams of venison. Backstrap or fillet are ideal as they are the correct shape. Other cuts can also be used with suitable trimming
- Prepared ground Szechuan peppercorns
- Half an onion
- Half each of red and green bell peppers
- Two medium-sized mushrooms
- Three shallots
- Three cloves of garlic
- A thumb-sized piece of fresh ginger
- Salt and sugar
- Baking powder
- Cornflour
- Light soy sauce
- Oyster sauce
- Chinese cooking wine
- Water
- Sriracha hot chilli sauce (optional)

Method

Slice your chosen cut of venison - rump on this occasion, into 5 or 6mm thick bite-sized pieces - cutting across the grain.

Place the venison into an appropriately sized bowl and add one teaspoon of sugar, half a teaspoon each of baking powder and salt, half the ginger finely grated, half a tablespoon of Chinese cooking wine, one-and-a-half tablespoons of cornflour and a tablespoon of water.



All of the ingredients to prepare the dish.

Spicy Szechuan venison

Combine all of the ingredients with the venison. Cover and allow to marinate in the refrigerator for about two hours.

While the venison is marinating, prepare the remaining ingredients. Slice the bell peppers into thin strips, dice the mushrooms and onions and finely chop the garlic and remaining ginger plus the white ends of the shallots. The green ends are cut into 50mm long sections for the garnish.

With most styles of Asian wok cooking it pays to have all of the ingredients prepared, vegetables cut to size and the liquid components measured out and placed into dishes. Working with a very hot wok once the cooking begins, the dish comes together quite rapidly. So it's best to have all of the ingredients at hand. That way the work flow is smooth and without interruption rather than having hold-ups locating some of the



Dry pan roasting the Szechuan peppercorns prior to grinding into a fine powder.

ingredients while those in the wok over-cook and potentially spoil the finished dish.

Start the cooking by bringing the wok or pan up to a medium high heat and add a tablespoon of peanut or canola oil. Then add the bell peppers, mushrooms, onions and quickly stir-fry for a minute or two. If the vegetables look a tad dry, add a light splash of water to finish the cooking, then remove them to a plate.

On a medium heat add another tablespoon of the cooking oil and then about half a teaspoon of the prepared Szechuan pepper and stir-fry for a minute or two to infuse the flavour of the ground peppercorns into the oil.

Next, add the garlic, ginger and white ends of the spring onions. Stir-fry for a minute then increase the heat and add the venison and cook until lightly browned. Now add the previously cooked vegetables and mix well. To complete the dish, add a tablespoon each of the oyster sauce and light soy sauce and combine to make the sauce. If the sauce is too thin, add a small amount of cornflour mixed with water to thicken the sauce. Finally add a dash of the Chinese cooking wine and the green ends of the shallots and serve.

If you enjoy a fair amount of heat in your Asian-style dishes the Sriracha hot chilli sauce can be added to taste, along with the



Bite-sized marinated venison ready for the wok.

garlic, ginger and shallots. Also the Szechuan pepper content can be increased if you like that numbing, tingling taste on your tongue that the peppers are renowned for.

If you are using one of the more tender cuts of venison the baking powder can be omitted from the initial marinade. Also, venison tends to 'cook on' that can lead to a slightly chewy texture so it's better to under-cook the venison prior to the vegetables being added and allow the residual heat to complete the cooking.

Served with a side dish of steamed or fried rice, Szechuan venison makes a great meal and is bound to please all those who try it. Just be a little careful with the hot spices. Remember they can be great slaves but poor masters. ■



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Sizzling hot Mongolian goat



Goat meat or chevon is a great resource to have in the fridge or freezer, particularly younger animals, and can be prepared in any number of ways. In parts of Australia graziers have found goats to represent another form of income, particularly during drought periods when cattle and sheep are doing it tough. But the goats seem to survive reasonably well. For this reason it's becoming harder to take a couple for the table in some areas.

On a recent hunting and prospecting trip the property owner was kind enough to allow the taking of a young goat for the

table. Considering the goat population, it was a fairly simple task to select an appropriate animal and after field dressing it, we hung it overnight to be cut up next morning. After that it was packed into the car fridge to bring home.

Given our penchant for Asian-style food, we decided to prepare the goat backstrap to form the basis for a Mongolian meat orientated meal. Mongolian lamb features on many Chinese restaurant menus and is a great tasting dish. So this gave rise to the idea of preparing the goat in this manner. Interestingly, this method of cooking originated in Chinese America and apparently you would be hard pressed to find it on the menu in a restaurant in China.

Ingredients

- Approximately 500 grams of goat backstrap, sufficient for two people
- Garlic
- A thumb-sized piece of fresh ginger
- Spring onions
- Palm sugar
- Baking powder
- Salt and pepper
- Light soy sauce
- Dark soy sauce
- Oyster sauce
- Sesame oil
- Chinese cooking wine
- Sriracha hot chilli sauce (optional)
- Peanut or canola oil

Method

Cut the backstrap across the grain into 8mm thick bite-sized pieces.

Place the meat into a suitable sized dish and add the marinade ingredients as follows: one tablespoon light soy sauce, half a teaspoon of baking powder, one-and-a-half tablespoons of cornflour, half a thumb-sized piece of grated ginger. Squeeze the juice into the mix then add the ginger and lastly a few dashes of ground white pepper. Mix all of the ingredients well and place to one side to marinate while the remaining elements are prepared.

Next, finely chop three cloves of garlic, julienne the remaining ginger and cut the white ends of the spring onions into small pieces - the green ends are cut into 50mm pieces for the garnish. Strips of red bell pepper can also be added for some extra flavour and colour.

To prepare the sauce, combine the following: one tablespoon each of oyster sauce, dark soy sauce, light soy sauce, half a tablespoon of palm sugar and the Sriracha. Half a teaspoon gives a pleasant amount of chilli flavour to the finished dish but more can be added if you like. Also put aside one cup of water and a tablespoon of cornflour mixed with water to thicken the sauce.

Once all of the ingredients are prepared and placed within easy reach of the wok or pan, the cooking can begin. Bring sufficient cooking oil to deep fry the meat up to approximately 180 degrees Centigrade and



A young goat hung overnight prior to being cut into portions for the trip home in the car fridge.

Sizzling hot Mongolian goat

deep fry the meat in small batches to maintain the oil temperature. This will prevent the meat from becoming too oily. Cooking time should be approximately 45-60 seconds to nicely produce a golden brown finish to the meat. Don't over-cook the meat as it will be added to the hot sauce later.

Once the meat is cooked and removed to a side dish, drain the oil from the wok leaving about two tablespoons to prepare the sauce.

Bring the wok temperature to a medium heat and add the garlic, ginger and white ends of the spring onions and stir fry for a minute or so until they become aromatic. Don't allow them to burn as it will spoil the taste of the sauce. Next, add the prepared sauce mix and raise the wok temperature to high and bring the sauce mix to a modest boil and stir well, then add the cup of water. While this is in progress, heat a sizzle plate ready for the dish to be added for serving.

When the sauce has been reduced slightly, add enough of the corn starch/ water mix to thicken the sauce to a creamy consistency. Next add the meat to the sauce and combine well, ensuring each piece has a good coating. To complete the dish add a half tablespoon of sesame oil along with one tablespoon of Chinese cooking wine and the green ends of the spring onions. Quickly combine everything and add the finished dish to the hot sizzle plate along with a light dusting with sesame seeds. Steamed or fried rice and stir-fried vegetables are a great match for this dish.

If all has gone to plan you will bring to the table a visually pleasing, sizzling hot meal of Mongolian-style goat that is bound to impress everyone present. ■



The ingredients to prepare the Mongolian style goat.



The backstrap trimmed of excess fat and tissue.



Deep frying the meat to an attractive golden-brown finish.



Gently stir frying the aromatics, making sure not to burn them.



Combining the deep fried meat with the Mongolian sauce.

Cuddeback E2 Long Range IR and E3 Black Flash trail cameras

Steve Bain

A fallow doe close to the camera and another in the background. The E3 takes good daytime images.

The Cuddeback E2 and E3 model trail cameras are two similar items with comparable software. However, in the hardware equipment stakes, the E3 has Black Flash and a 15m range, whereas the E2 Long Range IR has infrared flash and a 30m flash range. Each option has its strengths.

As intuition suggests, the long-range version will pick up critters further away. But at night this long-range camera will also fire a more powerful flash burst in order to reach out to the end of the detection zone. The result is that when an animal is close to the long-range game camera, there is the potential of too much flash bouncing off the

critter and this can result in a white-out of the near-ground sector of the image. This can eradicate a lot of the detail of the animal that you are trying to gain information on.

Both cameras offer a 'user-set' motion sensor choice between either wide view (wide angle detection arc) or centred view (narrow detection arc). To choose, the user selects from the push-button zone-control command sub-menu in the trail camera's settings. As well, externally and hardware-wise, the user selects the wide or centred lens set-up by adjusting the zone control shutter on the Fresnel lens either up (for centred/narrow view) or down (for wide view). This detail is explained in the

Cuddeback's 58-page instruction manual.

I use the wide view to monitor scrapes, fields and/or pond edges where critters may approach at any angle. On the other hand I use the centred setting in situations where my main effort is focused on capturing an animal with the centre aligned on a target zone such as a single wallow.

Having suggested the locations where I may choose to locate different types of cameras, let's have a look at the technology behind the selections.

A trail camera is made up of a motion detector, a digital camera and software.

Infrared (IR) technology is used to sense movement which then triggers the trail

Cuddeback E2 Long Range IR and E3 Black Flash trail cameras

camera to either take a picture or begin recording video (or both). Alternatively, the software can be also placed to a 'non-trigger' setting and on time-lapse mode.

Trail camera choice is not necessarily about which trail camera is the best overall. Rather it is about knowing which camera and its hardware and software attributes are best (most usable) for a specific scenario and desired outcome. Accordingly, field experience (and personally observed performance results) with each camera is an important factor for the astute user.

For me, in priority order, the three main attributes that I consider when choosing a camera for a location are:

1. Speed (trigger speed and recovery response time/delay)
2. Detection zone
3. Night-time (or not)

1. Speed and delay

Speed: This is a function of trigger speed and recovery speed/time. All other factors being equal, the quicker a camera's response times for the first and then subsequent images, the more images of game that you will obtain. Recovery speed (delay) is the time between images. Trigger speed is the time that a camera takes from the moment motion is detected until the photo is snapped (or video begins). In modern trail cameras the trigger speed should be under 0.5 seconds and the recovery speed should be prompt.



Cuddeback E3 camera on the right, with E2 on the left. Externally the noticeable difference is their flash modules. The front panel is open on the E2 in order to access the control panel through which the image taking settings are fine-tuned.

A recovery speed of more than two seconds will result in fewer successful images, especially if the subject is moving quickly through and then out of the camera's detection zone. Fortunately, these days most cameras have fast trigger speeds. Impressively both the E2 and E3 Cuddebacks have trigger speeds of around a quarter of a second (0.25 seconds).

A slow trigger speed can result in a blank image (ie, with no critters in it) because the animal has triggered the camera then left the scene before the photo is done. These are often classed in a group of unsuccessful images known as 'false triggers'.

Delays: The Cuddeback E2 and E3

can be user-set to have delays (responses/recovery) from as-fast-as-possible (FAP) to up to one-hour delay. In general I am a FAP fan. Cuddeback claims an approximate one-second delay between images when the T/C is set on FAP.

Burst: The E2 and E3 can be set to 'burst' mode through the advanced command settings. In burst mode these cameras will take up to five images in quick succession on each occasion that the camera's motion detector is triggered.

2. Detection zone

Detection range and angle: The detection zone's arc width and length/depth are



A left-hand side view of the slide-in bracket and the Cuddeback trail camera strapped to a tree. The depth of the unit is also evident.



The Cuddeback is unique in that you can adjust the zone control shutter (lower left as you look at the camera) up or down in order to widen or narrow the view of the Fresnel lens.

Cuddeback E2 Long Range IR and E3 Black Flash trail cameras

an important factor in choosing where to place your camera in the field. This detection zone is a combination of two measurements - the camera's detection range (the maximum distance at which movement triggers the camera) and its angle of detection (the maximum angle at which movement triggers the camera).

It is important to pay consideration to the angles of both the camera's sensor and the lens. With all game camera choices, if subjects are detected/sensed/triggered within a wide field of view and the lens is only capable of capturing images within a narrower field of view, you may end up with pictures with no animals in the frame. Yes, that's more false triggers.

From my field tests it is evident that Cuddebacks clocks less false triggers (therefore more images with critters in the frame) than some other brands that I tested alongside the E2 and E3. In turn, using up less images results in longer battery life.

3. Flash (night-time)

This is the main area of difference between the E2 and E3 models. While both offer over four watts of IR illumination power, the Cuddeback E2 with 24x 850nm IR LEDs has a 30m IR flash/illumination range. In comparison, the E3 with 24x 940nm LEDs has a 15m black flash illumination range. All this is achieved with only a short exposure from either trail camera.

The E3's claim to fame is that its 940nm LEDs give off no visible light, but they do have reduced illumination range and image quality. On the other hand, the 850nm IR LEDs are said to provide marginally superior image quality over no-glow 940nm LEDs, with more range and less motion blur. But these 850nm LEDs do emit a bit of visible light. Cuddeback advises that the 850nm is best for images and 940nm is superior for video. My preference is for the 940nm for images, unless I wish the long-range flash to reach targets that are further out.



A fox seen in a three-shot daytime 'sequence' from the Cuddeback E3. The camera was set to its factory preset follow up time lag.



Cuddeback E2 Long Range IR and E3 Black Flash trail cameras

E2 Long Range IR
LEDs: 24x 850nm
Flash type: Low glow IR
Flash range: 30m (100 feet)

E3 Black Flash
LEDs: 24x 940nm
Flash type: Totally invisible flash
Flash range: 15m (50 feet)

Night-time image (flash) appraisal

The E2 and E3 Cuddebacks take colour images by day and monochrome images by night. The quality of a night-time image is influenced by the trail camera's flash type. The flash needs to be powerful enough to light up a scene at your chosen range. However, if the flash is too powerful then it may white-out the images of objects and animals that are close to the camera.

If you want a flash that is marketed as less likely to spook an animal, then apparently you will want a camera with either red glow, low glow or preferably no glow. Astute readers may note a degree of scepticism in my previous sentence. This is based on experience. I have had critters spooked by all types of flash. However, I have also had deer alerted by the flash/shutter and then walk up to and eyeball the camera. It does not have to be a flash

that either spooks or attracts, just a red glow or noise can have an effect.

Cameras that attract critters can lead to some interesting images. A camera with short follow-up time and quick response and/or a burst feature will continue to snap photographs as the game walks towards the camera. This can result in some informative close-up images of tusks or antlers. Logically, and with reference to hip-speak lingo, we refer to these photos as 'selfies.'

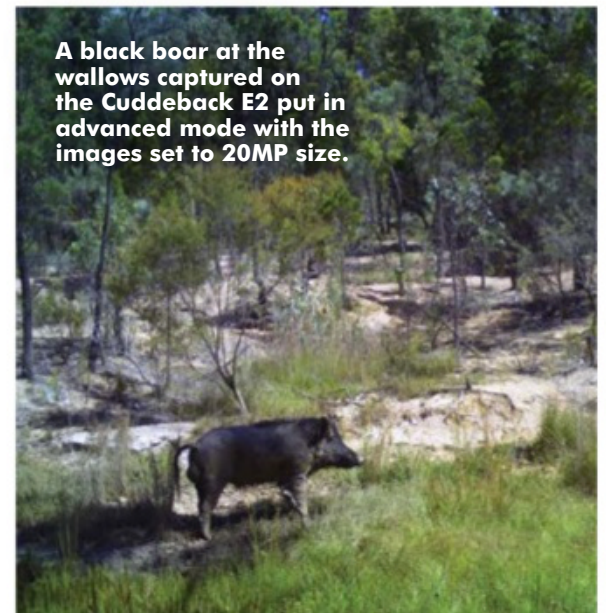
Using different cameras in your stake-out system

For me it is logical to use the Black Flash E3 in close-encounter situations such as where the camera is set within 10m of a deer scrape.

In situations where the tree that I am mounting the trail camera on is around 20m from a targeted wallow that I want images from, then the E2 Long Range is my preference.

Field test results = detection accuracy

The Cuddeback took less images than many other cameras that I have used in the past. With the cameras of various models and brands often mounted side by side when I do these tests, my experiences give me faith in Cuddeback's marketing,



which promotes less false triggers and thus a higher percentage of great images with game in them. Cuddeback credits its refined software combination for this outcome.

Summary – Cuddeback E2 and E3

The features of the Cuddeback E2 and E3 trail cameras, including the zone detection options and flash ranges, create flexibility in set-up that allow these cameras to be adjustable across and adaptable to a wide variety of scouting and information gathering situations.

It is also nice to know that these game cameras offer a two-year warranty if you register them online. Visit **cuddeback.com** for their full range of products, remembering that prices are in USD. ■

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Damned if you don't when dealing with ducks

Leon Wright



After heavy rain this dam overflowed out into the paddock and the ducks turned up overnight in the hundreds.



Even when hunting over dams, dogs are invaluable - Missy is seen here doing her bit.

The one thing I have learnt after being a duck hunter for more than 50 years is that you have to be prepared to adapt and change your hunting ways to be continually successful. We all have our special methods to hunt ducks. While many hunters attend big shoots on the numerous swamps that abound in our country, you have to be ready to share the waterways with plenty of like-minded hunters. In my younger days I attended shoots on places like Mansfield Swamp, Greens Lake, Dowdle Swamp and Barren Box Swamp. These are just a few of the locations I have hunted over.

These days I steer clear of the big swamps, much preferring the solitude of a

backwater where I am happy to set out a block of decoys and sit back with my dog to await the arrival of ducks looking for a quiet spot to avoid the pursuit of hunters. I usually spend the first few weeks of the season hunting over my decoys, but eventually the ducks become wary and it takes skilful calling to coax them to commit. It's around this time that some of my duck hunting acquaintances give it away, citing the lack of ducks as an excuse and sit around bemoaning their lot.

What they fail to realise is that the ducks are still there, but they have altered their feed and flight patterns. No duck is going to stay on a swamp during the day if they are continually hunted. They evacuate the

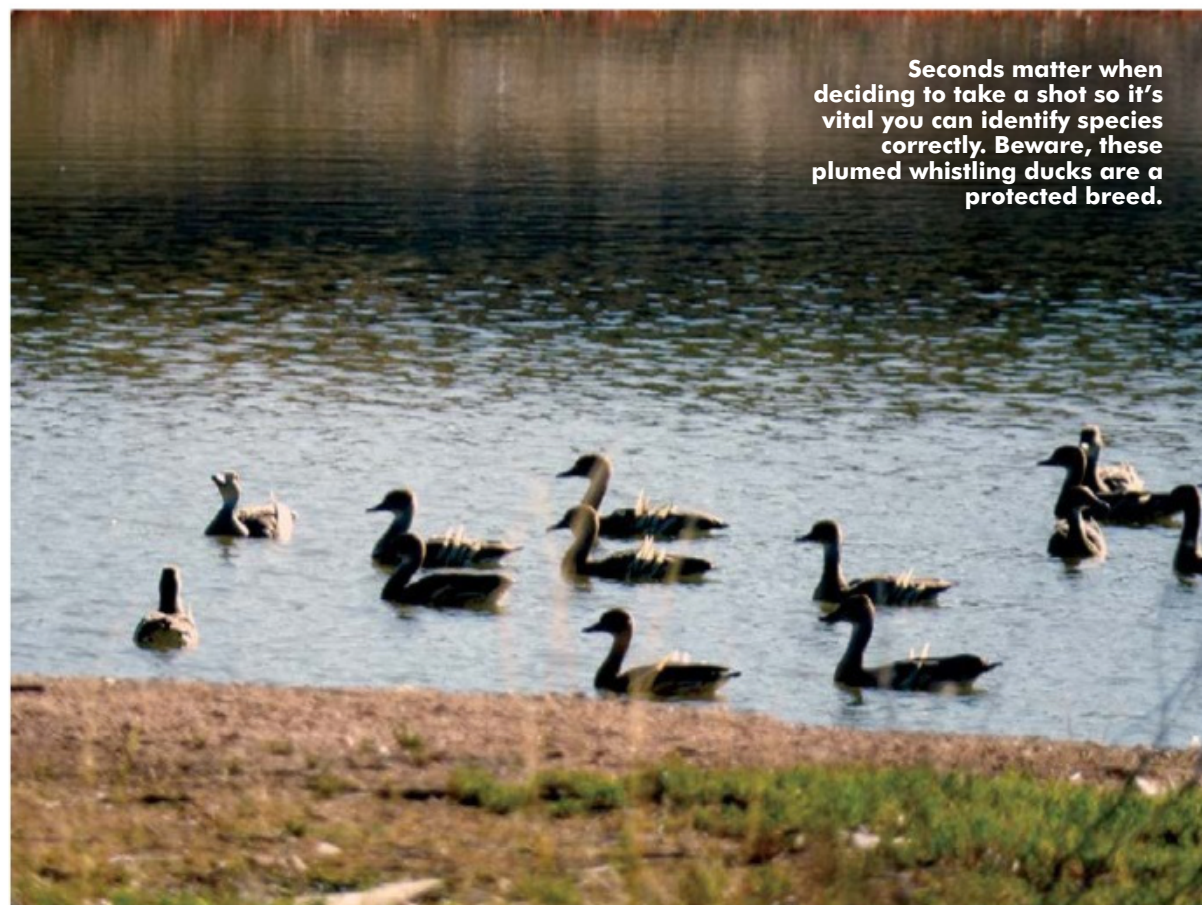


Damned if you don't when dealing with ducks

scene after an early morning shoot to find a secluded site well away from hunters, then they sneak back into the swamp at last light to rest up for the night.

It is near this time, about three weeks after the season opening that I start checking out the dams for numerous ducks that will seek these places, especially those in the back blocks. So while my hunting friends sit at home, I change my routine and concentrate on the ducks frequenting these out of the way dams.

I am lucky enough to live in the bush and have access to a large amount of private property, which in turn has numerous dams dotting the landscape. While wood ducks often take up a large proportion of the bag, I have taken every species that we are legally allowed to hunt during the season while hunting over dams. Next to wood ducks, the blackie and teal would have to be the next most common ducks encountered. Probably the only duck I haven't come across while hunting over dams would be the pink ear duck. Hard head, chestnut teal, mountain



Seconds matter when deciding to take a shot so it's vital you can identify species correctly. Beware, these plumed whistling ducks are a protected breed.

ducks as well as the protected species such as whistlers and the partially protected blue winged shoveller are seen on the dams; it is always a lucky dip.

Sometimes there is nothing, other times a nice mob of woodies may be bumped

into, lazing the day away, and, of course, there are times when the dam is completely packed out with blackies or teal. I well remember sneaking up on a small dam, expecting, if my luck was in, to catch a pair of blackies unawares, only to be confronted by around 100 chestnut teal covering the water, their green heads shining beautifully in the early morning light.

While duck hunting over dams there is no great need for a lot of equipment, such as is required when targeting ducks in other ways. Decoys aren't really necessary unless you are hunting with a party and know that the ducks will move from one dam to another. Apart from your firearm, two good things to have with



Wood ducks (maned geese) are probably the species most often found when hunting over dams.

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Damned if you don't when dealing with ducks

you are a trusty pair of binoculars and a retriever. The binoculars are excellent for sussing duck numbers from a distance, so not leaving you totally unprepared for whatever you will stumble upon when walking up the dam bank.

The wily woodie is no slouch and, definitely no pushover. If the mob has had a few shots up their feathers, they are bound to have a lookout posted on the dam bank to keep an eye open for impending danger. I have often sat frustrated, watching a large group of woodies on a dam, trying to plan a way of skirting around the sentry they had billeted on the wall.

A retriever is a definite advantage, for quite often a duck that has fallen to the shot has plopped slap bang in the middle



Long-time duck hunter and old friend, Tom Lowe, with Missy and the results of a successful stalk on a nearby dam.



When dams overflow into neighbouring paddocks, they are a magnet to species like teal and black ducks. They appear out of nowhere and can be found in large numbers.

of the dam. Valuable hunting time can be lost by having to wait for the duck to drift in, that is if the wind is blowing. It's not advisable to go swimming for ducks in dams and some hunters who haven't a dog will use a fishing rod and lure to help retrieve a duck. A wounded duck is notorious for its abilities to avoid being found by a hunter, not so a dog which will effortlessly find a hiding duck. My curly, Missy, has an unblemished record and has sought out numerous ducks that had gone down in heavy cover bordering dams. Even though dead, they seem to disappear in the thick growth.

When putting in a stalk on a dam, we first check it out with the binoculars to see



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Damned if you don't when dealing with ducks

if there are indeed ducks about and, secondly, which side of the barrier they are on or if they are on water. If on the bank they will be on the side that protects them from any wind that may be blowing. Having their presence and location established, we commence our advance. If we are approaching a dam that is in a stubble paddock, we make sure we walk along the gaps in the stubble. These breaches are usually made when the crop is being stripped. By doing this we are marking out our path as silently as possible. And believe me, a hunter crunching his way through stubble will quickly put the ducks up.

As well as this, we try to move with the sun over our shoulder and into the wind. Naturally, this is not always possible but if we can incorporate it into our strategy we

certainly do. An early morning start is not necessary and we often conduct a hunt during a more gentlemanly time, about mid-morning or mid-afternoon. These days we haven't much choice regarding shotguns. The self-loader, much beloved by most duck hunters, is no longer an option, nor is the slide action, thereby leaving us with the double gun being the side-by-side or under-and-over. The single barrel is not out of place and will certainly do at a pinch. I do most of my duck hunting with either of a pair of Beretta classics, one in 12-gauge and the other in 20-gauge. Which one I use on any given hunt is usually governed by availability of ammunition.

Most shots attempted when hunting over dams, in my area especially, fall within the 30m to 40m range on rising ducks. The

standard choke set up with the improved cylinder choke in the bottom barrel and the modified choke in the top barrel have served me well and, if I do my bit, I am usually successful.

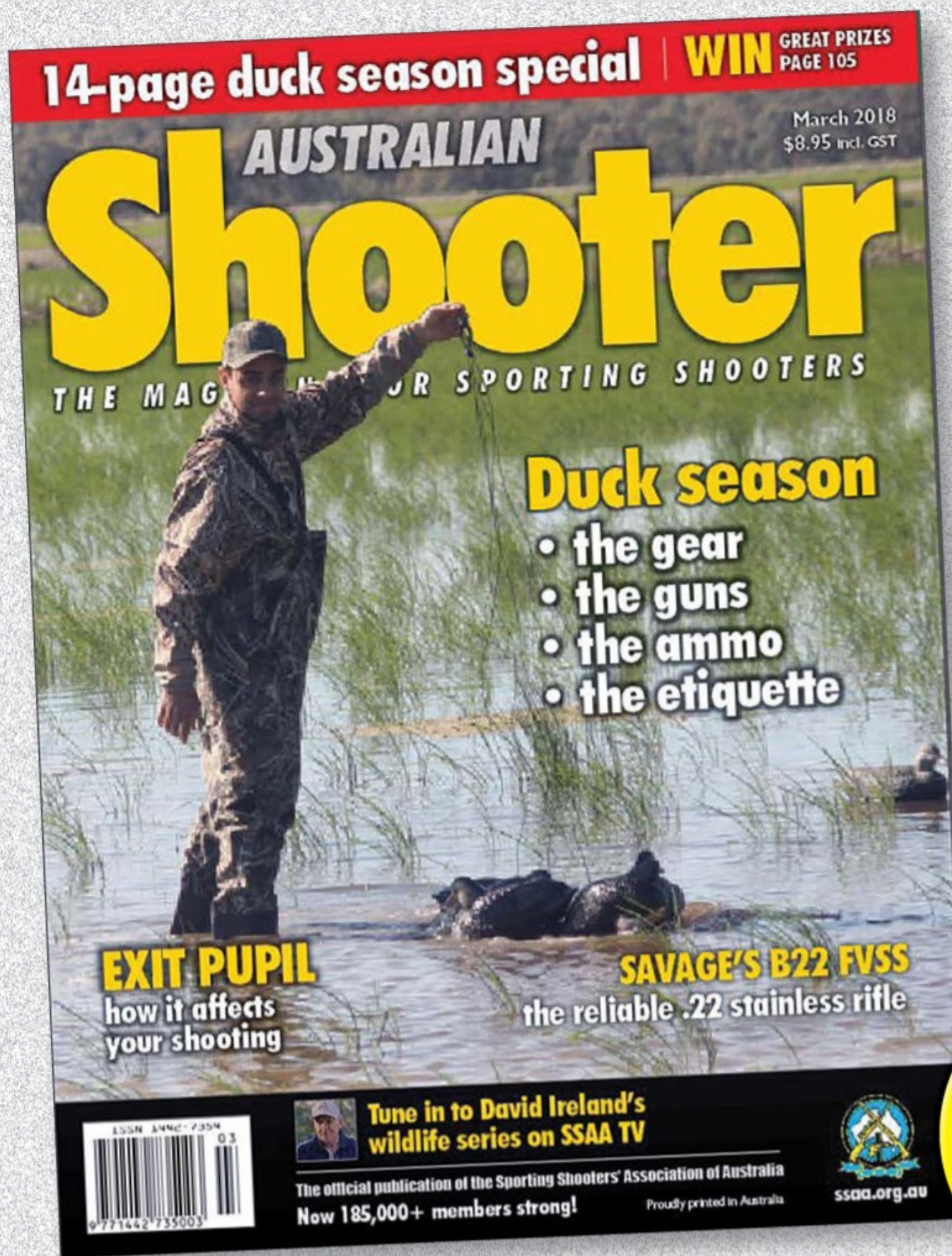
I don't hide the fact that I am not a great fan of steel shot, but I grudgingly admit that if you marry the right choke selection to the right cartridge you will see the job done. Woodies have been known to be hard to drop at extended ranges and for this reason I limit my shots to no more than 35m while using heavier size shot, no smaller than No. 4.

All up, a day out hunting on dams is far better than sitting at home, twiddling your thumbs, so during the season, with landholder permission, give the dams a go. ■



When sneaking up over a dam bank ready to take a shot, you could encounter a few ducks or, if lucky, dozens.

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Barrett Fieldcraft Lightweight rifle speaks for itself

Don Caswell



The Barrett Fieldcraft
Lightweight is a fine
hunting rifle.

Barrett Fieldcraft Lightweight rifle speaks for itself



Barrett is a name familiar to shooters and synonymous with heavy-calibre, long-range military rifles. However, Barrett does cater for hunters and recreational shooters as well. Among their large selection of military firearms, they have the Fieldcraft collection of bolt-action, lightweight hunting rifles.

The Barrett company was founded in 1982 by Ronnie Barrett and is based in Murfreesboro, Tennessee in the US. *Australian Hunter* was given the opportunity to review a Fieldcraft Lightweight in .270 Winchester. Nioa is the Australian agent for Barrett and provided the rifle, scope and an array of ammunition.

First impressions

Sliding the Fieldcraft Lightweight out of its packing carton my initial impressions were of a simple yet slick design. The machining of the receiver stood out, nicely contoured, smooth and trim. With its hand-laid carbon fibre stock, featuring a blind magazine, the rifle is truly lightweight.



The magazine well, spring follower and bolt.

The balance was good and would be perfect once a scope was fitted. The simple, unembellished lines of the stock made for a comfortable and very pointy rifle. The rifle hinted at the quality of the old Mauser custom actions and the elegantly efficient stock design of British custom rifles.

The rifle is 44.3" (1125mm) in total length. Without scope or ammo, the bare rifle weighs 2.5kg. The Fieldcraft comes in 10 calibres: .243 Win, .22-250 Rem, 6.5 Creedmoor, 7mm-08 Rem, .308 Win, 6 Creedmoor, .25-06 Rem, .270 Win, .30-06 Springfield and 6.5x55 Swedish.

The barrel

The barrel is of 416 stainless steel. It is 24" (609mm) in length, light sporter profile with a one in 10" rate of twist. The rifling is distinct and sharp. Manufacture includes button-rifling, precision-honing and stress relieving. The muzzle is gently crowned with a slight bevel. Barrett advises that their barrels do not require a breaking-in procedure and that, with usage and proper cleaning, accuracy generally improves over time.



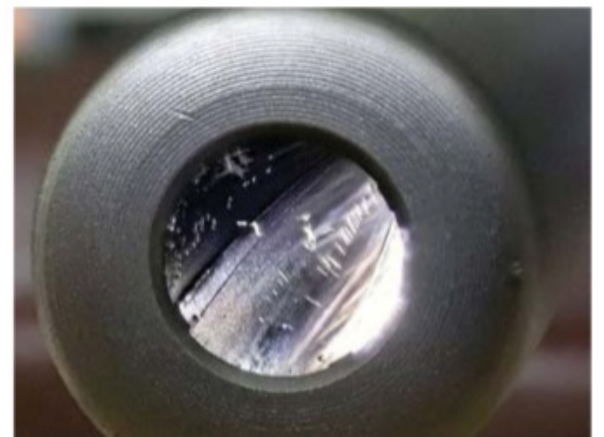
Two massive locking lugs, Sako-style claw extractor and ejector.

The receiver and bolt

The receiver and bolt are machined from 416 stainless steel. Barrett actions are scaled specifically for the calibre chambering. That means the receiver and bolt are as large as they need to be. The end result is an action smaller than the common one-size-fits-all approach where the design caters for the largest possible chambering. This is another significant weight-saving option in the Barrett Fieldcraft. Alongside my various .223 Rem rifle bolts, the Barrett Fieldcraft .270 Win bolt is significantly smaller.

The receiver top offers a single, concentric mounting plane for better sighting alignment. There are five #8-40 threaded screw holes in the receiver. The extra hole for the front base mount allows greater latitude in positioning the scope – a useful feature. The safety catch is located on the right-hand side of the receiver. A bolt release latch is situated on the left-hand side.

The slim bolt has spiral fluting for both visual appeal and additional weight-saving. The bolt handle is T-jointed and pinned to the body as per the 'old school' method



The crowned muzzle and its sharply defined, honed, button-rifling.

Barrett Fieldcraft Lightweight rifle speaks for itself

of machined gunsmithing, rather than the widespread modern, and cheaper, soldering method. A Sako-style claw extractor and large-sized ejector ensure positive engagement and vigorous extraction. There are two, large locking lugs on the bolt head.

Barrett advises that the front action bolt should be set to 80 inch-lb torque and the rear bolt to 36 inch-lb. Given the high strength nature of the carbon fibre stock, that high tension is perfectly fine and ensures an intimate fit of action and barrel to the stock.

Scope mounts

Barrett Fieldcraft rifles have Talley ring and base mounts specific to the rifle. With the single, concentric mounting plane of the receiver, there is no differentiation between front and back mounts. Each ring and base is one piece.

The trigger and safety

Barrett Fieldcraft rifles come with Timney adjustable triggers fitted. Barrett recommends leaving the triggers as set by the factory. I checked that with my trigger scales and found a consistent 2.6lb weight of pull, which is fine for a hunting rifle. As you would expect, the trigger was nicely crisp as well.



The action.

The safety is two-position. A low-profile, knurled knob provides positive engagement of both 'safe' and 'fire' positions. The bolt can still be stroked in 'safe' mode, allowing any rounds to be safely ejected from the blind magazine.

The magazine

Barrett Fieldcraft rifles have blind magazine wells that hold four rounds in any calibre.

The stock

Fieldcraft rifles have hand-laid, carbon fibre stocks. This construction offers enormous rigidity and weight savings. The action and barrel are hand-fitted to ensure a good link into the stock. There is no metal bedding system because it is unnecessary. The



Barrett Fieldcraft rifles come factory-fitted with Timney adjustable triggers.

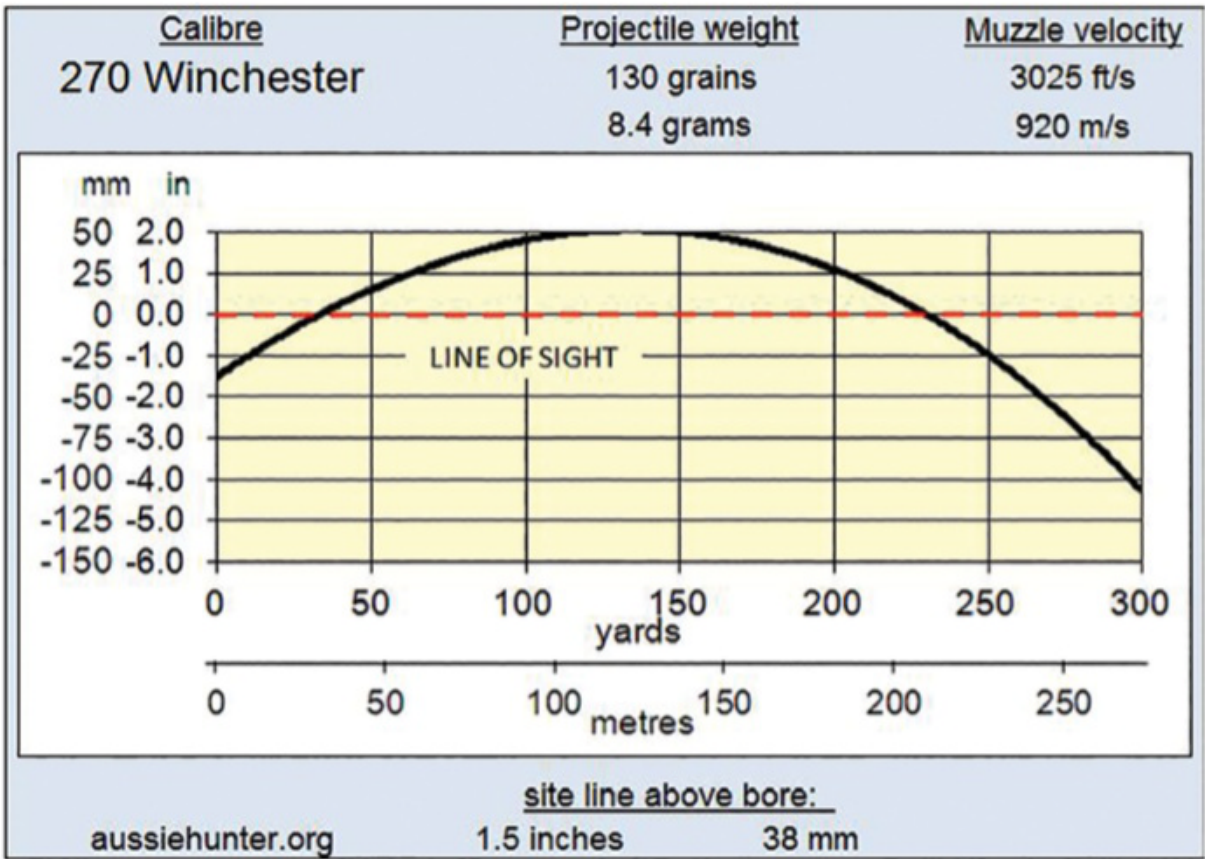
rigidity and inert nature of carbon fibre stocks provides all the necessary bedding required for good accuracy. The stock has an unembellished, straight-line design for offhand and typical hunting field positions.

The scope

The rifle was provided with a slim and lightweight Leupold VX-3i 2.5-8x36 scope which is in keeping with the lightweight theme. The scope features the duplex reticle. The adjusting turrets provide 0.25MOA adjustment. The Leupold VX-3i offers excellent lowlight performance and tough but compact and lightweight construction. It is an ideal companion to the Barrett Fieldcraft rifle.

Off the bench

The Barrett user manual, which incidentally is one of the best rifle booklets I have seen, advises on using factory ammunition only. Barrett states that they have put a lot of effort into optimising the design of the rifle to suit factory ammunition. On that basis, I limited my testing to the range of factory ammunition that was provided with



Barrett Fieldcraft Lightweight rifle speaks for itself

the rifle. Factory ammunition delivered excellent hunting accuracy (refer to the test results table).

In the field

The .270 Win is one of the world's most popular and effective hunting calibres. For decades it was the king of the castle and many famous gun writers sang its praises. It is just as effective and good a choice for hunting as it ever was, even though recent and more trendy calibres now have the stage. The flat-shooting 130-grain load has a dead-on trajectory (\pm 50mm from centre of aim) out to about 250m, making it a fine choice for hunting.

Overall

The Barrett Fieldcraft Lightweight hunting rifle is the epitome of the much-quoted ideal of the mountain rifle. Truly light of weight, with a comfortable and elegantly simple design, chambered in flat-shooting, hard-hitting calibres, this is the rifle for

serious trophy hunters. Machined, honed and hand-fitted - this is how rifles used to be made.

Manufactured from 416 stainless steel and carbon fibre, this rifle is as robust as they come and impervious to the worst weather and tough conditions. It is a quality bit of engineering, carefully designed and constructed to the highest standards. The price, of course, reflects that and even when retailing upwards from \$3600 it represents good value. ■



The Barrett Fieldcraft shot all factory ammo well, but Don particularly liked the Fusion 130-grain soft-points.

Ammunition test results

Ammunition	Muzzle velocity fps	Average accuracy MOA
Fusion 130-grain soft-point	3010	0.7
Federal Power-Shok 150-grain soft-point round-nose	2850	1.0
Federal Premium 140-grain Trophy Bonded Tip	3030	1.4
Federal Power-Shok 130-grain soft-point spitzer	3015	1.5
Federal Premium 130-grain Nosler Ballistic Tip	3085	1.5

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Clubs & competitions

The SSAA has about 440 clubs and ranges throughout Australia. We cater for target shooters and hunters who may want to sight-in their firearms at one of our many ranges. Our clubs also offer many different types of rifle, shotgun and handgun shooting competitions, whether you are a weekend club shooter or are aspiring to be a serious national or international competitor.

ssaa.org.au/disciplines

Magazines & more

The *Australian Shooter* magazine is the pride of the Association and is mailed as a bonus to our members 11 times per year, saving them almost \$100 each year on the newsagency price. Our other publications cover topics such as hunting, a how-to guide to shooting and hunting, handguns, politics, state updates, something for teenagers and even a handful of cookbooks. In the digital age, we have a variety of websites, e-newsletters and social media. We also have our own SSAA TV channel on YouTube featuring how-to videos on competitions, hunting, butchering, firearm maintenance and more.

ssaa.org.au/publications

SSAA Gun Sales

SSAA Gun Sales is an online service for SSAA members, dealers and the Australian shooting and hunting community, including firearm owners, collectors and enthusiasts. Designed to be Australia's most comprehensive firearms and accessories trading website, it has heavily discounted listing fees for members and is safe, secure, legal and easy to use.

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Hunting

SSAA members can also sign up free of charge to the SSAA Farmer Assist program, which connects members with farmers who require wildlife culling to maintain their property. The program is run online at farmerassist.com.au and requires members to undertake accuracy accreditation to be eligible. Many states run dedicated hunting programs often called SSAA Conservation & Wildlife Management. Members can learn four-wheel drive, GPS and other outdoor skills that will enable them to be better hunters while helping preserve Australia's environmental balance. Across Australia there are a variety of hunting-specific courses and clubs available to all members that will introduce you to game stalking, butchering and, of course, firearm safety in the field. Whether hunting rabbits, ducks, foxes, pigs or trophy deer, the SSAA can point you in the right direction.

ssaa.org.au/hunting

Membership services

Our members are the SSAA and we have a dedicated team of professionals available to ensure you get the most out of your membership. Our goal is to reach 200,000 members by 2020. We can only do that by satisfying our stakeholders, supporting our dedicated volunteers and continuing to expand and improve our services. Newly introduced benefits include our extremely affordable firearms insurance and discounted online firearms trading through our SSAA Gun Sales.

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SSAA Store

We wear our logo proudly and we encourage our members to do the same. Our SSAA Store features many items for sale including clothing, camping gear and firearms accessories. You will also find the SSAA's mascot, Trigga the Koala. This Australian icon helps explain to our local and international friends alike the conservation role that hunting and the SSAA play in protecting our distinctive Australian environment and wildlife.

store.ssaa.org.au

Lobbying & SSAA Legislative Action (SSAA-LA)

The SSAA lobbies all arms of government including local, state and federal. The SSAA can often be found consulting with firearms registries, state parliamentarians and also at the table in federal parliament negotiating to protect members' chosen recreations and pastimes. Through our SSAA Legislative Action (SSAA-LA) department, we specifically praise and publicise lawmakers and commentators who support us, while exposing the ignorance of those who wish to damage our sport.

On the international front, we even have Non-Government Organisation status within the United Nations and regularly participate in international forums. You can follow our political activities in our variety of magazines, websites and social media.

SSAA SHOT Expos

Each year, we host at least one large, professional shooting and outdoors expo showcasing the best products and services available in the Australian market. The SSAA SHOT Expos can attract more than 15,000 people during a weekend looking for the perfect firearm, scope, knife or accessories to add to their kit. Previously held in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth, upcoming expos are advertised throughout our magazines, websites and social media.

Youth development & firearm safety education

The SSAA conducts regular safety classes and practical instruction on firearm safety. The Association works closely with the firearms industry in the promotion of responsible firearms handling among junior shooters across Australia. You can sponsor a junior's membership and help set them on the right path to responsible firearm ownership and to the enjoyment that comes with being a sporting shooter.

ssaa.org.au/juniors



ssaa.org.au

Join us!



Ridgeline's *Tru-Shot 25-litre hunting backpack*

Con Kapralos

Having a decent hunting backpack to cater for a day trip out to your favourite spot need not set you back a small fortune nor have you opting for department store 'school' versions. Ridgeline of New Zealand have come to the rescue with a new 25-litre backpack that ticks all the boxes regarding what a proper hunting bag

should be plus one neat feature which will be well appreciated.

The Tru-Shot backpack is just that – it offers an integral shooting rest moulded into the front of the backpack. Many hunters the world over who hunt on foot will decide to take a steady shot using their backpack for a rest/support. Ridgeline took this fact on board when designing the Tru-Shot

backpack but the shooting-rest aside, it is packed full of great features.

Outdoor Sporting Agencies, the Ridgeline distributor in Australia, sent *Australian Hunter* one of the new Tru-Shot 25-litre backpacks to assess for our readers. From the outset, being a dedicated user and owner of Ridgeline apparel, footwear, hunting luggage and accessories, I knew the Tru-Shot backpack would 'hit the bullseye' in terms of product quality and price.

The backpack up close

The Tru-Shot backpack with its 25-litre capacity is ideally suited as a daypack where the hunter will carry gear required for their day's hunting. The backpack comes in a Nature Green fabric which is of excellent heavy-duty quality, waterproof and rip-proof.

The pack comprises of two main storage compartments which are furnished with two-way heavy-duty zippers that are easy to open/close, even with gloved hands. Within the largest compartment, there is a pouch for accepting a hydration bladder as well as another for more storage.



Ridgeline's Tru-Shot 25-litre hunting backpack

In the other smaller storage compartment, there are obligatory pouches for lesser items such as keys and tiny nick-nacks as well as plenty of additional storage space. Externally, there are three additional pouches which are accessed through separate zippered closures. One pouch located at the top of the backpack will easily fit a phone or GPS unit, which can be retrieved without having to access either of the two main compartments.

The other couple of slots are located on the lateral flanks of the pack and are ideal for storing diminutive items such as folding knives, headlamps and similar. The backpack is attached to a lightweight frame which is vented and keeps the body of the pack away from the user's back. This permits air to flow between the user's back and pack and stops the backpack absorbing perspiration.

Quality shoulder and waist straps are anchored to the frame and are smoothly adjusted to suit the user. Once the straps are correctly set up, the backpack is comfortable to carry without any undue movement. One neat feature also noted are two small pouches on the belt harness which contain ammunition loops within. These loops can hold centrefire ammunition and allow easy access to spare rounds, without them rattling about in a shirt or trouser pocket.



The moulded foam rifle rest on the front of the Tru-Shot backpack is what gives the unit its purpose.

However, the main feature which gives the backpack its name is an integral moulded foam shooting rest on the front. The foam rest contains two ridges which can be used to cradle the rifle fore-end if choosing to shoot at your quarry using the backpack as a rest. It certainly functioned well, testing it at the rifle range when shooting off the bench, over the bonnet of my vehicle and out in the field. Anywhere that a true rest is needed, the Tru-Shot backpack with the integral rifle rest will work nicely.

Finally, one excellent feature which isn't apparent is a removable blaze-orange cover which you can use to keep your backpack



Two zippered ammunition pouches on the waist supports will keep plenty of ammunition on hand and within easy reach.



The smaller front storage compartment contains closures for multiple items.

dry and make yourself even more visible out in the field. This cover is located in a small pouch in the base of the backpack itself.

As mentioned previously, the Tru-Shot backpack was tested in several scenarios and stalking out in the field. It was excellent to carry, no doubt in part to its rigid frame and quality shoulder and waist straps. With a 25-litre capacity, it had all the room I required for my day's hunting – and I am known to lug quite a bit of gear with me. Just ask any of my hunting buddies.

The Tru-Shot 25-litre backpack is a quality unit and with a retail price of \$159.95, represents a great buy and quality piece of gear for the stalking hunter. For more information, visit ridgelineclothing.com.au ■

Lighter on your wallet

Lightforce Striker LED driving lights

David Henty



The road ahead is illuminated by the impressive beams of the Striker lights.

Striker LED driving lights are one of the few kits in Australia that are supplied with an electrical relay kit and harness ready for owner installation. This saves quite a lot of money as auto-electricians can charge the price of the lights again in labour and parts.

Due to their light weight and smaller footprint they can be installed on nudge bars or even number plate mounting

brackets. The kit also comes with the necessary parts to combine with your high beam lights so you can activate the on switch and have high beam and the Striker lights on simultaneously. This is handy when you need to turn them off quickly such as when you see the lights of oncoming vehicles.

At \$599 per pair they are more compact than the small to medium pizza-shape

traditional spotlights and look modern and stylish. They would be just as appropriate on a city car as they would a Nissan Navara prepared for the weekend hunt and camping trip. Sold with a three-year warranty, they are supplied with two spot filters that also act as protection from road debris and bugs. These can be interchanged with spot or combination covers that sell separately for \$28 a pair.

Made in Australia, they generate one lux at about 754 metres and are based on a 5000k colour temperature that is easier on the eye and reduces glare and fatigue. Each utilises just 60 watts and has a draw of only 4.4 amps at 13.2 volts which is the magic of LEDs. Each light has 15 'Lumiled' LEDs.

In a land of kangaroos powerful driving lights are a must when night driving. LightForce's Striker lights may well save you again on repairs to your rig while making your journey a lot more enjoyable.

They can be ordered from lightforce.com and are delivered with free postage. ■



The Striker LED lights perform a great job for a journey under darkening skies.

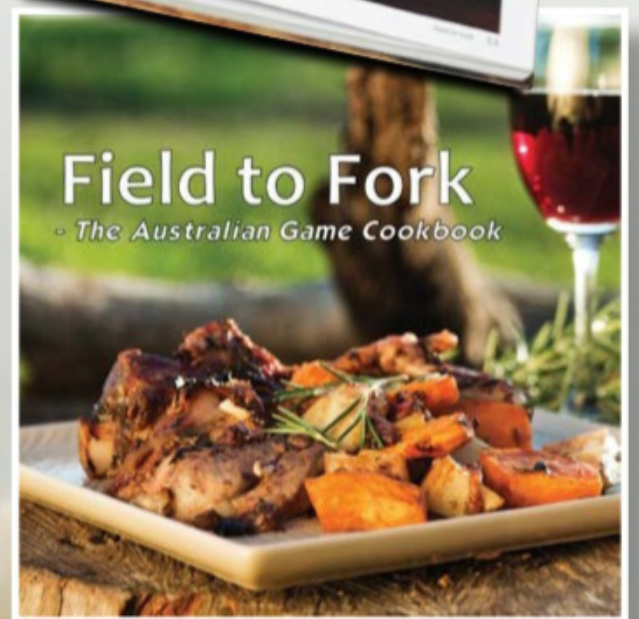
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Get into Austealth camo clothing

Don Caswell



The Austealth orange jacket and cap with native coloured cargo slacks.

Austealth is a new Australian company that makes camouflage clothing for Aussie hunters. Although the USA has long led the world in camo gear, there are drawbacks. As good as things are for American conditions, the style of camo merchandise is not a great fit for the Australian bush and our methods of hunting.

Austealth has recognised that and provides an array of camo garments designed for Aussie needs. Austealth was only recently established by Rob and John. These fellows have drawn on decades of personal field experience, hunting a wide assortment of game animals across the spectrum of Australia's wilderness areas from Tassie to the Top End.

Austealth conducted extensive in-house testing of materials, patterns and colours. The paramount requirement was that the wearer remains dry, warm and comfortable. That needed to be achieved without compromising the stealth factor. Austealth outfits feature noise-reducing



The Austealth jacket with cuff rolled back to show the elastic, integral thumbhole fit that will keep out draughts.

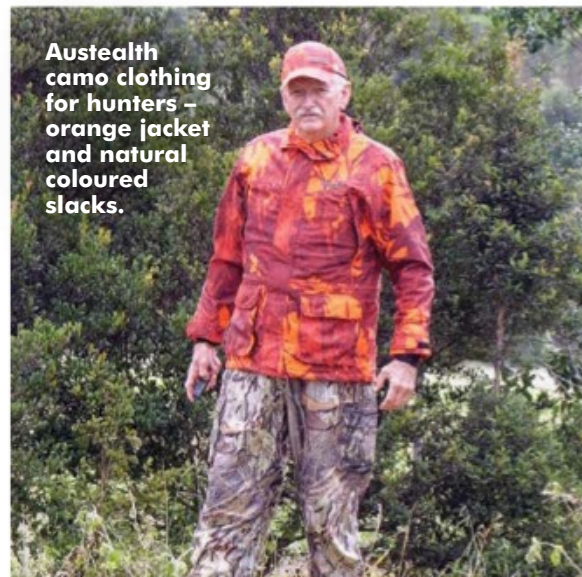
Get into Austealth camo clothing

fabric in a variety of unique Australian bushland colours. Orange camo is also an option.

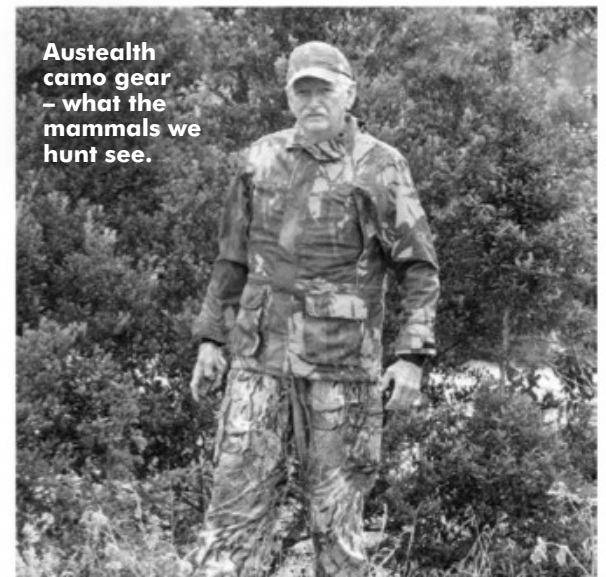
There is no doubt that a hunter wearing camo has a distinct advantage in the field. This gain can be maintained at the same time as a significant safety aspect is met - by wearing bright orange camo. The animals we hunt have monochromatic vision. That means they do not see colours, especially the orange and red hues that are so vibrant to human vision. The lurid, day-glo orange of blaze camo is only apparent to our eyes. Wearing this makes us highly visible to fellow hunters while appearing no different than normal camo to animal eyes.

If your circumstances do not need blaze camo, or you are concerned at alarming the neighbours by hanging such vibrant apparel on your clothesline, Austealth offers its clothing and headwear in natural Aussie bush colours.

The folks at Austealth provided their stalker and hiker jackets, cargo pants and a cap to *Australian Hunter* to review. The pants (RRP \$120) and stalker jacket (RRP \$220) were in native camouflage colourings. The hiker jacket (RRP \$196) and cap (RRP \$30) were in orange mode. The material used is soft to the touch, having an almost velvet-like feel. All these items,



Austealth camo clothing for hunters – orange jacket and natural coloured slacks.



Austealth camo gear – what the mammals we hunt see.

including the cap, were lined. That certainly added to the comfort factor. The cap and pants contained a light mesh, whereas the jackets were fleece lined.

Both jackets also have thumbhole elastic cuffs that seal off any errant cold breezes from finding their way up your arm. The jackets feature clip-button flaps to cover the zippers for assured weatherproofing and warmth. Both jackets and pants possess plenty of large pockets. The quality of materials and construction is excellent.

The stalker jacket has extra padding and a thicker lining of insulation. There are also additional pockets, including a large waterproof back pocket. The hood on the stalker is detachable. The premise of the stalker jacket is that of the slow-moving or even stationary hunter in a cold environment. The hiker jacket is a little lighter in construction, being better suited to walkers and trekkers where the wearer is in active motion.

The materials chosen by Austealth are waterproof but breathable. Specifically, Austealth uses tricot fabric with a water resistance of 3000 to 5000mm. The breathability of the fabric is rated at 800mvp (moisture vapour permeability). The polar fleece used by Austealth varies depending on the garment. Typically the fleece is of a 320 to 390gsm (grams per square metre) rating. Zippers are the heavy-duty 5# nylon YKK variety.

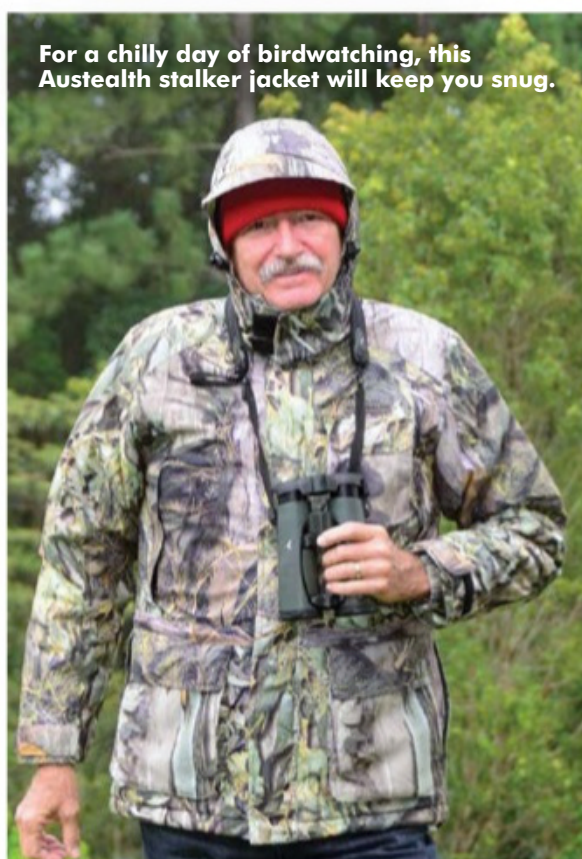
With that, and the lining, their clothing is comfortable and snug with great wind shielding capacity. For a wet, winter sambar

hunt in the Victorian alps, or maybe even a bleak day out at the footy, the stalker jacket is guaranteed to keep you comfortably dry and warm.

I put the native colour camo of the stalker jacket to the test on a drizzly winter's day for some wetland birdwatching and photography. Unlike most mammals that have monochromatic vision, birds do have colour vision. Natural coloured garb is a much better choice for moving close to wary water birds. In a hunting situation, the orange camo is a sensible pick. You are well concealed from the game you hunt, while being highly visible to other hunters. The orange hiker jacket would be my option for deer and wild dog stalking.

Whether you are hunting with bow, rifle or camera, Austealth camo wear will maximise your chances of success. Designed specifically for our Aussie bushland, Austealth fashion has been well conceived. The materials used and the sewing is all first-rate. The clothing is comfortable to wear and ensures you stay dry and warm whatever Mother Nature dishes up on your outing.

Visit **austealth.com** for more info and their full range of products. There is a lot more attire on offer, apart from the cap, jackets and slacks I have mentioned here. You can also find Austealth on Facebook and Instagram. Austealth products are available at an increasing number of retail outlets. The Austealth website lists the shops where you can see and buy the goods. ■



For a chilly day of birdwatching, this Austealth stalker jacket will keep you snug.

The stealthy feral tabby cat

David Duffy

Some may argue that the fox is our most cunning varmint and the crow the most clever, while I'd say the starling in the field is the most difficult to shoot with a centrefire rifle. Those who regularly hunt wild dogs would surely say they are the smartest. For me, even though a wild dog comes close, bagging a prowling feral cat gives me more satisfaction than any other of our pests.

When rabbits were in plague proportions before the advent of myxomatosis, large numbers of cats were released into the wild so as to reduce the bunnies' numbers. However, this wreaked havoc on our native species, which were not adapted to ward off the feline threat, and continues to do so.

Sometimes feral cats will be attracted by a predator call, but I've usually found hunting them to be an opportunistic thing, coming across them when I've been on the trail of something else. And so it was, with this particular stealthy feral cat.

The first time I laid eyes on him was in the late afternoon when targeting a fox. He was on the other side of the creek to me and moving quickly. Then he disappeared into a depression in the ground. Hastily making my way across the creek via stepping stones and over to the hollow, I found that he had vanished. Now this feral cat had a distinctive tabby coat. Several times I specifically hunted the area for that cat but he evaded me.

The feral tabby cat was shot on the other side of a creek with an Anschütz .22LR.



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The stealthy feral tabby cat

I've shot feral cats with a range of calibres from .22LR up to .270, but if I had to nominate my favourite for hunting them, it would be the .222. A .223 would also fit the bill as would slightly less powerful cartridges. Larger calibres such as the .243 will certainly see the job done, but you don't need that level of destruction. Save the .243 for the wild dogs on the run.

Feral cats are tougher than rabbits and although a .22LR works well most of the time, I don't want to try to recover them from down a rabbit hole or underneath blackberry bushes. The .222 kills them on the spot. For longer shots past 80m, the .222/223 is vastly superior to the .22LR. I load 24 grains of BM2 with a 50-grain Sierra BlitzKing in the .222.

A rifle ideal for foxes will also be suitable for feral cats. The possibility of scoring a feral cat (or a fox) is a good reason for me to take the little Sako AI .222 out for a walk. This is a nice rifle/cartridge combination for wandering around after foxes and feral cats.

After several attempts at trying to take that tabby cat, I started to think I'd never



David likes this Sako AI in .222 for feral cats and foxes.

see him again. Months later on a bright sunny morning, instead of taking the .222, I grabbed the Anschütz 1416 .22LR and loaded the 10-round magazine with 42-grain Winchester Power-Points. I was after some rabbits so as to make a rich tomato stew.

After crossing the creek, I walked along the embankment to where there were quite a few rabbit warrens. I spotted a couple of rabbits bouncing around enjoying the morning sun. They were only about 40 paces from me so I stopped walking. One of the rabbits had his back to me and it appeared that he started chewing some blades of grass.

Almost in line but only about 15 paces from him and staring intensely at the

rabbit was the feral tabby cat. The feline stealthily moved a couple of steps forward and stopped. He was so absorbed at watching the rabbits that he hadn't noticed my approach. I eased the .22LR off my shoulder and opened the bolt to feed a round into the chamber from the magazine.

With the noise of the cocking bolt the feral cat turned his head and looked at me. In an instant he had fled across the creek, somehow navigating a crossing without becoming wet and was soon among some small plants that lined the other side of the bank. He started to run parallel with the creek. By now I had the butt of the rifle against my shoulder with a Power-Point chambered and was looking through the 4x Pecos scope.



A rabbit near a creek is attractive to a feral cat.

Be part of the **SOLUTION**

Save our wildlife!



**Join a SSAA Conservation & Wildlife
Management group in your state - ssaa.org.au/cwm**



The stealthy feral tabby cat

Swinging the cross-hairs so as to match the speed of the cat, I aimed just in front of his chest hoping that it would be the correct amount of lead. I shot at the moving cat through some bushes and had just enough luck that the projectile didn't hit any branches. The bullet crashed through the shoulder and he was dead right where I shot him.

I used to rely on the 40-grain Power-Points, which were very good. The 42-grain Power-Points travel slightly faster (1251 v 1314 respectively in my rifle with 23" barrel) and hit even harder. This makes them adequate for close-range foxes and cats with accurate shot placement.

Feral cats come in a range of colours such as tabby, ginger and white but the most frequent where I hunt is black. If you want to keep the fur of the feral cats then using a .17 calibre and a projectile that makes a small entry hole and blows up inside the cat without exiting is ideal. This is the same principle that was used when fox pelts attracted a reasonable price.

With their great nocturnal vision, feral cats are less frequent in the day. Hunting

them at night with a rifle mounted spotlight is one of the most successful methods.

It's often the case that foxes and feral cats exist in the same area and you don't know whether you will see a fox or a feral cat. When foxes are after game to eat, they often seem to be 'busy' checking out lots of places and covering plenty of ground. Feral cats on the other hand are more slow, deliberate and sneaky.

Much of the time I've come across feral cats near rabbit warrens. If those warrens are close to a creek, then that may be even better because the feral cats will also try to ambush ducks and ducklings on the creek bank. Often the remains of a wood duck or black duck can be found not far from the water's edge. The cats kill a lot of our native wildlife, so every feral cat downed is good for our environment.

Hunting varmints is not just enjoyable but is also fine practice for seeking big game. It's not always the case that you can go deer hunting for example and often with sambar you may pursue them for some time without firing a shot. Access to properties with pests is usually less restrictive than



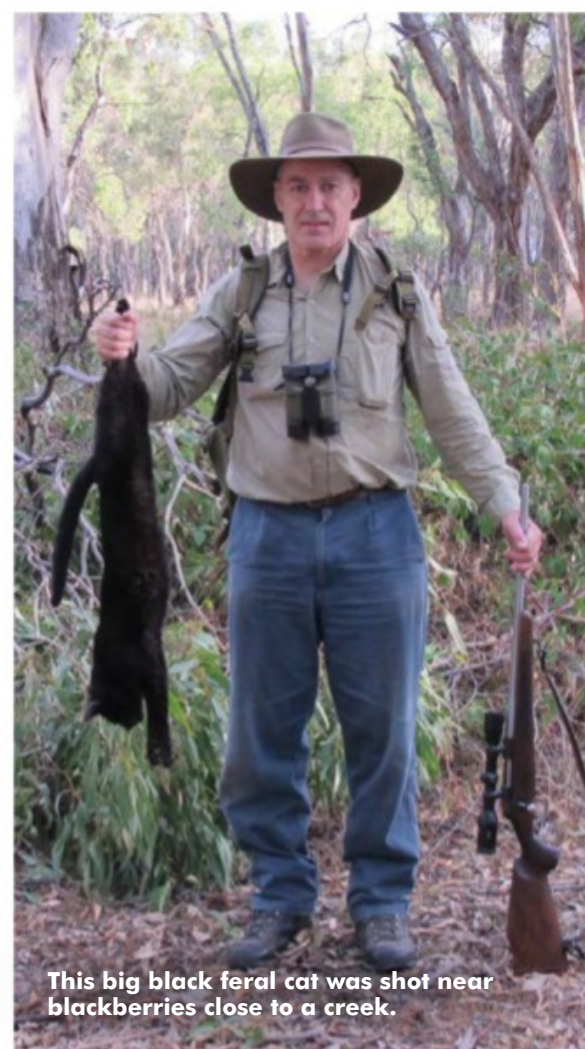
This feral cat was taken while sitting on a rock beside a creek with a Sako AI .222.

estates with healthy numbers of bigger game.

A big black prowling feral cat or a beautifully-coloured stealthy feral cat is certainly an admirable prize. ■



Feral cats and foxes are often found in the same area.



This big black feral cat was shot near blackberries close to a creek.



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CJG002 - Medium
CJG003 - Large
CJG004 - XL
CJG005 - 2XL
CJG006 - 3XL

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CJB002 - Medium
CJB003 - Large
CJB004 - XL
CJB005 - 2XL
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SSAA Victoria Conservation & Pest Management

THE SSAA VICTORIA Conservation & Pest Management program is an initiative started in conjunction with Parks Victoria operating under a Memorandum of Understanding. Accredited SSAA members volunteer to control pest species and problem species in national parks, state forests and on private holdings. The CPM provides accredited members the opportunity to participate in conservation, whereby effective methods are adopted to achieve real and positive conservation outcomes. To participate, you must be a member of the SSAA, then participate in an accreditation course with a written test and practical shoot.

For further information, write to SSAA Vic CPM at Unit 2, 26 Ellingworth Pde, Box Hill, Vic 3128, phone 03 8892 2777, email cpm@ssaavic.com.au or visit ssaavic.com.au

SSAA SA Conservation & Wildlife Management

SSAA SA Conservation & Wildlife Management contributes to the preservation of South Australia's natural heritage through the humane removal of feral and pest animals that threaten the survival of our native flora and fauna. Activities are undertaken in conjunction with government departments, non-government organisations, private landholders and universities.

Membership is open to SSAA members. To participate in field activities, you must successfully complete our accreditation course (theory) and safe firearms handling and marksmanship competency (practical). Activities are run throughout the year, ranging in duration from one to eight days, often involving camping out. As well as undertaking animal control activities, members are involved in wildlife monitoring and working bees.

For further information or to attend a quarterly meeting or range day, write to Conservation & Wildlife Management (SA) Inc, C/O Secretary, PO Box 188, Kent Town, SA 5071, email secretary@conservation-wildlife.asn.au or visit conservation-wildlife.asn.au

SSAA WA Conservation & Wildlife Management

SSAA WA has six individual branches that undertake Conservation & Wildlife Management activities throughout the state.

All participants must be full members of SSAA WA. Prior to taking part in sanctioned field activities, members must complete accuracy and safety tests, as well as a written assessment covering navigation, bushcraft and hunting ethics. In addition to formal programs, the branches conduct a range of social and training activities.

Our branches are involved in a variety of conservation-based activities in cooperation with private property managers, local municipalities and state government agencies. We work closely with other conservation organisations. Projects cover a wide range of feral and pest species, as well as agricultural protection.

For further information or membership inquiries, phone the State Coordinator on 0429 847 590 or email conservation@ssaawa.org.au

SSAA NT Conservation & Pest Management

SSAA NT CONSERVATION & Pest Management operates in the north of NT as part of the SSAA Conservation and Wildlife Management group, providing a free community service to government, pastoral properties and traditional landowners to assist with eradication of feral pest animals.

Membership is open to NT residents who successfully complete a theory and practical assessment. All field activities comply with NT Parks guidelines for the destruction of pest animals, the Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals and the Model Code of Practice for the Destruction of Feral Animals.

Each year there are six to nine one-week field operations on remote pastoral properties and National Parks, involving four to five members.

Meetings to plan and coordinate activities are held as required at the SSAA Darwin Branch Range at Micket Creek Shooting Complex in Berrimah. Further details, including membership forms, can be located within the Darwin Branch clubhouse or through the contacts below.

For more information, write to CPM (NT), PO Box 90, Karama, NT 0813, email pduff@iinet.net.au or cscousins64@gmail.com

SSAA Qld Conservation & Wildlife Management

THE SSAA QLD Conservation & Wildlife Management Branch aims to assist in the protection and restoration of Australian biotic communities by developing feral animal control programs in conjunction with landholders, government departments and community-based groups.

Membership is open to SSAA members. Members must pass a written test and a marksmanship test before attending field activities. We conduct quarterly training and information weekends, covering a wide range of topics for members and prospective members. Among other things, training weekends cover conservation, hunter ethics, teamwork, bushcraft, navigation, first-aid, marksmanship and hunting techniques.

Durations range from one day or night to 10 days and usually involve camping on a property. Activities include hunting, shooting and trapping pest species (typically cats, pigs, foxes, wild dogs, feral cattle, deer and goats), and monitoring endangered species by data collection and radio tracking.

For further information, email cwm@ssaaqld.org.au or visit cwm.ssaqld.org.au



- Supporting conservation activities
- Supporting research activities
- Supporting sustainability and wise use

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ABN 95 050 209 688

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Phone 02 8805 3900 Fax 02 9832 9377 Email mem@ssaa.org.au

Membership No.

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

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

First name

Middle name

Last name

Residential address

Town/suburb State Postcode

Postal address

Town/suburb State Postcode

(IF DIFFERENT FROM ABOVE)

Phone (Mobile) (Home)

Email

Date of birth Male ☐ Female ☐

Member referral number if applicable

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☐ \$158



☐ \$70

☐ \$100

Additional Family Member (No magazine) Applies to each additional person over 18 residing at the same address as a full-subscription **Adult** member.

☐ \$105

☐ \$135



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☐ \$70

☐ \$100

Pensioner Available on production or photocopy of both sides of your Australian Concession Card.

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PLEASE READ AND SIGN

This application is made in full recognition of the Association's requirement for responsible and ethical behaviour. I undertake to do all in my power to preserve the good image of the sport and the Association. I understand that members breaking the Code of Conduct may be subject to suspension or expulsion. The Code can be found at ssaa.org.au/code

SIGNATURE:.....

DATE:.....

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

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

ATTENTION NSW & ACT MEMBERS

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

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- ☐ HUNTING OTHER (R licence, property owner/permission)

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and for just \$35 you get \$25,000 worth of firearms and fixed accessories cover.

Want to know more?

Call us at SSAA



02 8805 3900



PAYMENT OPTIONS

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

☐ Cheque ☐ Money order ☐ MasterCard ☐ Visa

Card number

Expiry date Signature.....

Cheques payable to the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia Inc.

I also wish to donate the following amount to the SSAA \$.....

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Trevor Jenkin
SSAAGiB National Manager

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***Office Hours** SSAA Insurance Brokers Pty Ltd | CAR 315403 | ABN 86 077 822 970 is a Corporate
Authorised Representative of PSC Connect Pty Ltd | ABN 23 141 574 914 / AFSL 344648

A SSAA member advantage



Competitions

For your chance to win one of these competitions, write your name, address and phone number on a piece of paper and place it inside an envelope, and write the name of the competition on the front of the envelope, and send it to:

Australian Hunter 71
PO Box 2520, Unley SA 5061

Or enter online at ssaa.org.au/win

Competitions close February 29, 2020

(Name of competition)
Australian Hunter 71
PO Box 2520
Unley SA 5061

Enter online at ssaa.org.au/win

Nextorch MyStar Headlamp



Valued at \$119
Kindly donated by
Beretta Australia
berettaaustralia.com.au

One of two handgun cleaning kits



Valued at \$79 each
Kindly donated by
Ozzie Straight Shooter
ozzistraightshooter.com

SSAA Outdoors Bag



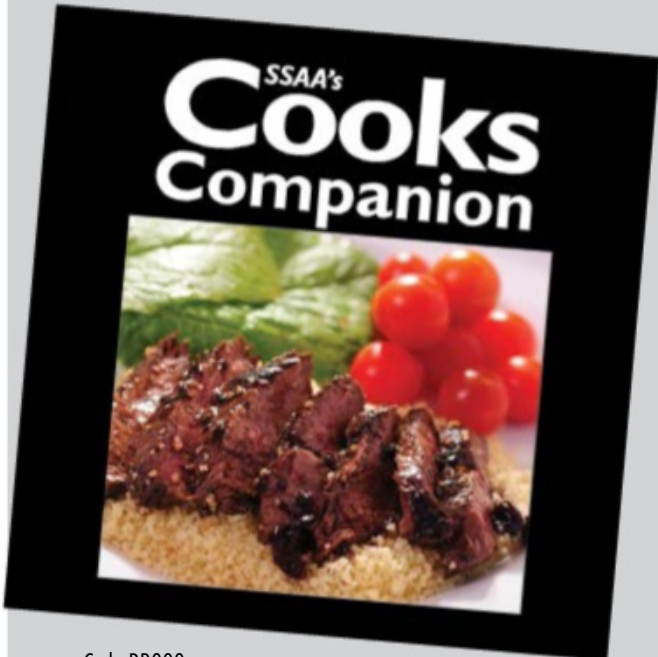
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SSAA's Cooks Companion

This book features the best 50 recipes from SSAA members. It includes recipes for rabbit, kangaroo, pork, venison, seafood, duck and quail, as well as camp favourites such as damper.



Code RB000
\$29.95



SECURE Your Gun SECURE Your Sport

**Safe firearm storage is
your responsibility.**

**Failure to secure your firearm in
accordance with the law attracts
heavy financial penalties and
possible loss of licence.**

Firearm registries contact details

Australian Capital Territory

Phone: 02 6133 2122
Fax: 02 6133 2188

New South Wales

Phone: 1300 362 562
or 02 6670 8590
Fax: 02 6670 8558

Northern Territory

Phone: 08 8922 3543
Fax: 08 8922 3540

Queensland

Phone: 07 3015 7777
Fax: 07 3015 7788

South Australia

Phone: 08 7322 3346
Fax: 08 7322 4182

Tasmania

Phone: 03 6173 2720
Fax: 03 6230 2765

Victoria

Phone: 1300 651 645
Fax: 03 9247 6485

Western Australia

Phone: 1300 171 011
Fax: 08 9454 1522

ssaa.org.au/licensing

For additional information regarding regulations for storing and transporting firearms, including on flights and when importing or exporting items through Customs, as well as more contact details for each state and territory's firearms registry.

Commended by the
Australian Institute of Criminology

PROMOTING GUN SAFETY
The Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia Inc.

