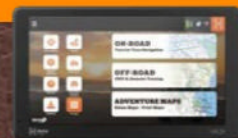


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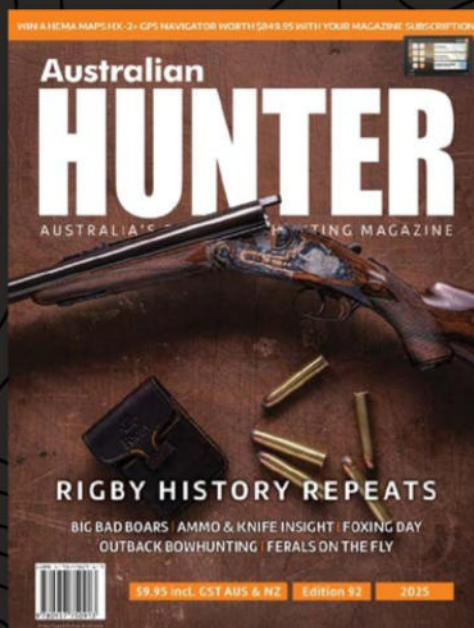
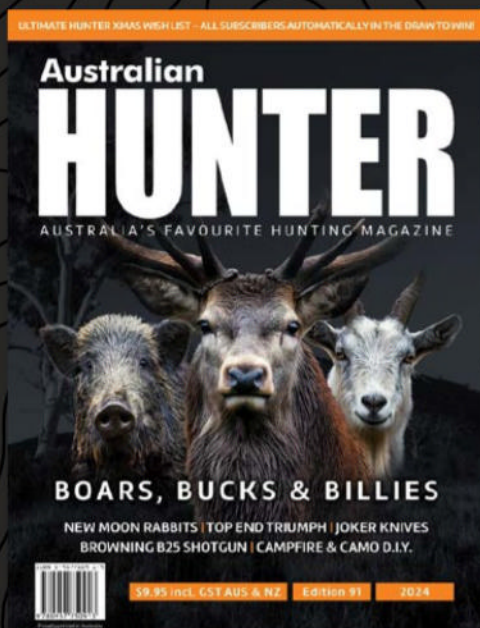
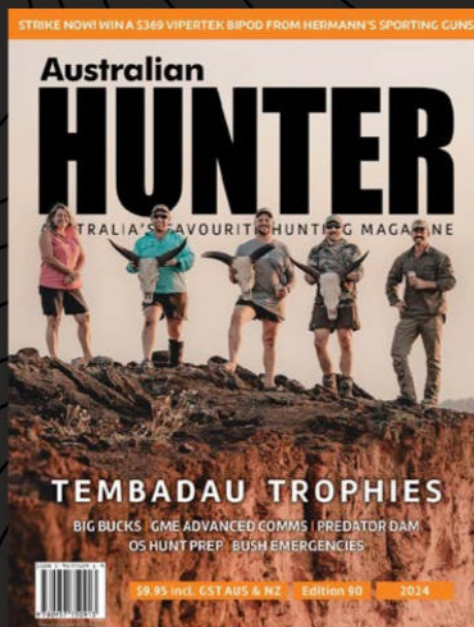
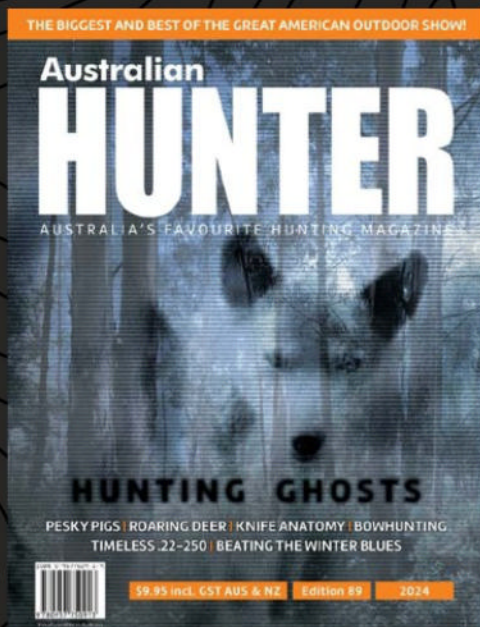


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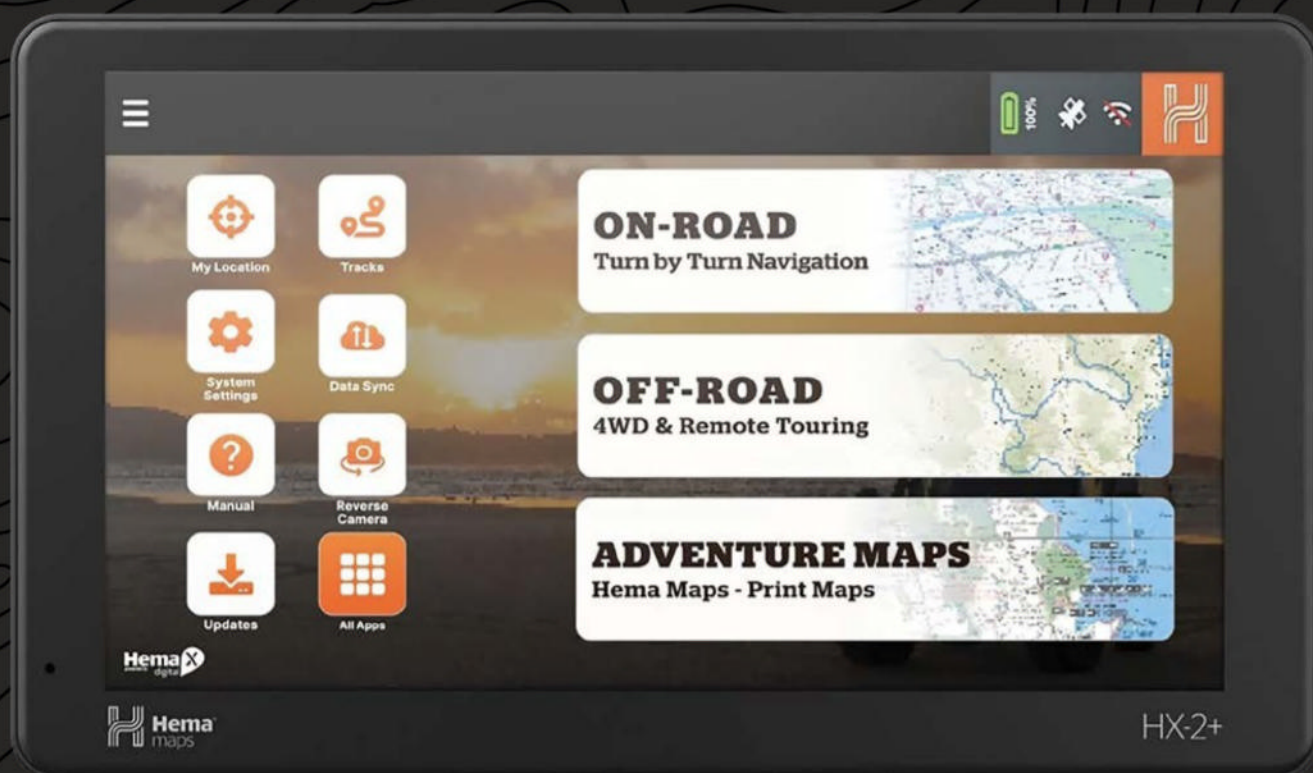
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Thomas Cook
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FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome back! I hope your holidays were filled with great memories and you had some time to hunt over summer. If not, the upcoming roar season is a perfect chance to hone your skills and potentially bring home tasty venison or a trophy. This issue is packed with stories and resources to inspire you, from easy venison Bolognese to thrilling hunts for grand chital in North Queensland and massive wapiti in New Zealand. Further game recipes make the most of what is often overlooked, for one reason or another.

Our hunting bucket list highlights top targets for breathtaking hunts, both in Australia and abroad. Plus, we pay tribute to a late friend with South African hunting adventures. While hunting is more than just a pastime, it certainly adds richness to life.

This edition dives into ammunition essentials, from reloading and choosing the right bullet to understanding shot placement and (in)accuracy. We also discuss the ideal riflescope for hunting and not being weighed down with your scrub gun. Our cover story offers something different as we explore the resurgence of Rigby, an historic London gunmaker, benefitting the global shooting and hunting community. We also review Beretta's new limited-edition 486 Paralello shotgun, which we can't wait to hunt with – watch this space. Plus, we offer tips on choosing the right hunting knife for your needs, including one that's custom made.

From hunting boars in the Gulf Country to bowhunting goats in the Outback, we cover diverse Australian terrain. This also involves feral cats, foxes, wild dogs, hares and more. Learn how to make the most of trail cams to help 'capture' game and discover new products to enhance your hunting outings. And yes, we even tackle the unconventional – ever considered eating feral cats or cane toads?

As a thank you to our subscribers, we're offering a bonus prize: the Hema Maps HX2+ GPS Navigator, perfect for any hunting adventure. Subscribe or resubscribe by May 31, 2025, to be in the running! More details on the inside front cover in case you missed it.

All the best for the year ahead!

Australian **HUNTER** Edition 92

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ALTERNATE TARGETS

Purported piggy
problems turn to feral
cats, foxes and hares
for **Scott Heiman**





Camp all set up for the next few days and nights.

It's funny how things work out. My dad has been home brewing beer for as long as I can remember, gifting some to friends and relatives. A bottle recently ended up in the hands of a property owner an hour's drive from dad's home, passed on by a family friend. While dad hadn't met the bloke, the farmer was so pleased with the brew that he invited dad to hunt on his property, any time he liked, provided he brought more with him. Delighted with the offer, dad headed out for a meet-and-greet, to recon the property and to learn more about it. In doing so, he soon learned that feral pigs were getting into the oats planted to feed the beef and dairy cows. There was apparently a real need for some targeted vertebrate pest management. And dad was happy to oblige.

The only trouble for dad is that he's 75 years old and there are few locals able to hunt with him. So, naturally, he turned to his eldest son and asked if I'd like to be his hunting buddy. Which is great, except I live 1300km away, across two state borders,

and the inland roads enroute can be terrible, particularly after crossing the NSW border into Queensland at Boggabilla. But, with school holidays on the horizon, we took up the offer.

What pigs?

When we arrived at the property, we sought out the owner and introduced ourselves. While he already knew my background as a hunter, both my wife Kath and daughter Scout have hunting credentials of their own. Importantly, while Scout has been a bowhunter since she was old enough to pull back a string, she'd recently obtained her Junior Firearms Permit, and this would be her first foray hunting with rifles. Having shared some of our own home produce of jams and marmalade with the farmer, we set off to find the campsite he recommended, with enough trees to block the wind but sufficient sun to keep the solar panels busy so our camp fridges would stay cool. One fridge was empty with a view to filling it with wild harvest.

Walking to camp while the others drove, I looked for sign, finding pig tracks, but far fewer than expected. Sure, there was a bit of sign in some dried-up mud, but it was at least 1–2 weeks old and nothing major. It was the same situation that afternoon. Kath and Scout set out for a hunt along a creek bed near camp, while dad and I checked out the main dam. When we got back, we all agreed, the pigs *were* there but they'd been AWOL for at least a week.

Trapping 101

While surprised by the apparent lack of pigs, I was far from disheartened. We'd told the property owner that we'd help deal with his ferals, and that's what we were going to do. While the pig sign had been scarce to this point, the same couldn't be said for cats. I'd already found two ferals lazily sunning themselves on a hay bale at a shed near the campsite. On seeing me, they simply loped away slowly like they'd never seen a human before. And I had just the equipment with me to deal with them. Specifically, I own a fox cage trap – and it's

Alternate targets

proven useful for more than just its advertised purpose.

Fox cage traps can be bought and owned legally without a permit and I periodically set up my cage trap near my chicken coop, baited with a temptingly smelly meal of sardines or mackerel in oil. As it turns out, cats – not urban foxes – were the assassins of my chickens and my fox trap is a humane way of dealing with them. Having trapped them successfully, I take them to the local RSPCA who work out what to do with them next. While useful at home to protect my chooks, I also take my cage trap on hunting trips. This way I can passively target cats and foxes while actively hunting other target species. I consider it my own small contribution to protecting local native biodiversity.

Cage trap

Scott's cage trap is a Heavy Duty Fox Trap with Floor Plate (AT200) from Elite Pet Products, purchased from Powells' Stockfeeds. It's 43cm high x 38cm wide x 85cm long with a mesh size of 25 x 25mm. It has a rear steel plate door for release/extraction with a 1-piece ridged trap with a metal floor plate. It retails for \$290.

In urban/residential areas, cage traps are preferred over foot hold traps as fewer injuries are sustained, and because non-target collar-wearing animals can be easily taken to the nearest council pound or RSPCA depot for assessment. In some states this is a legal requirement. Meanwhile, trapped foxes can be transported away from the area for euthanasia. Any non-target species caught are easily released, with early detection reducing stress.

Feral finds

Despite the lack of decent pig sign, we headed out spotlighting after dinner to see if we could find the source of the farmer's purported piggy problems. It was night one, the sun had disappeared, and the moon had risen. Given that we had only three days hunting scheduled, there was no time to spare. But things were not as we'd been led to expect. As the



The trap helped put an end to this feral cat.

night progressed, we saw nothing at all. It seemed like the animal world had been given the memo that the Heimans were in town, and it was time to go to ground!

Nevertheless, all was not lost. As we entered the last paddock for the night, Scout's excited young voice proclaimed: "There, there, right in front, over near the tree." Then we saw it. Caught in the vehicle's headlights were a set of eyes about 150m directly in front. As dad halted the car, I handed him the spotlight and he tracked the fox as it darted from cover into the paddock of stubble. I took aim, dad whistled, the fox stopped 100m from me. Quartering away, with its head turned looking straight at us, its eyes shone brightly. Taking aim at roughly the 5th rib, I controlled my breathing and 'Bang', my new custom-built Remington 700 had just notched up its first feral by putting a .308 sized hole in the fox's chest.

As for the fox cage trap. It had been working hard while we'd been out. We checked it on the way back to camp and found it had caught an incredibly angry and massive tabby cat. Being around 60cm long from head to hind quarters, with another 25cm of tail, it was almost as long as the trap. Resetting the device, we hopped into the car for a well-earned break before an early start.

Dawn breaks

The following morning, dad and I went for a stalk towards the large dam on the other side of a small ridge near camp. It was an enjoyable day. Hearing the bird songs saying goodbye to the night and hello to the sun is a beautiful thing. Dawn in the Australian bush truly is salve for the soul.

As it turned out, foxes seemed to be more prolific on this property than pigs. Sidling up to the dam, with our backs to the scrub to break up our outline, we spied a fox sniffing its way through the morning dew just 25m away. I wrapped the sling around my arm to increase my own stability by transferring some rifle weight and to reduce elbow movement. Breathe, prep, sight, press – 'Boom!' Another fox down. Not surprisingly, it had dropped on the spot. After all, we were looking for pigs and I was loaded with Sierra .308 Win 165gr SBT GameKing ammo from Australian Outback. The sound of the shot reverberating in the hills put paid to any chance of hearing any more of the morning bird chorus I'd been enjoying so much. But my spirits were high.

On the way back to camp, we circled back past the fox cage trap and, lo and behold, it was occupied. I recognised the cat in the trap as one I'd seen on the day we arrived. So, the tally so far was two foxes and two cats a mere 17 hours since our arrival on the property. Not bad – but still not a pig in sight.



Not a bad collection for the first 17 hours on a new property.

Oily goodness

It's worth having a few tins of oily fish in the tuckbox, even if you don't own a fox cage trap. Served on crackers, oily fish in tins are a major source of vitamins and minerals, making them a handy snack while you're out hunting. And by pouring out the excess oil on an exposed log or rock, you can sometimes lure in an inquisitive cat or fox with the strong smell. Just avoid tins of fish that advertise seasonings like garlic and onions. These are toxic to cats and foxes, and they tend to avoid them.

Husk of hares

The rest of the day was uneventful, so it was back to spotlighting. Still no pigs, but now that we'd dealt with a couple of foxes and cats, it seemed like the fields had come alive – with hares! I was still holding the .308 Win, but in the back seat of dad's dual cab, was Kath holding the SportCo Model 62A in 22LR.

Off in the stubble, 100m away, I could see the eye shine of a lolloping hare. Dad edged the car closer and from the back



Scout with her first rifle-shot game.

Alternate targets

seat a young voice piped up: "Daddy, that's a hare, right?" "Yes honey," I replied. "Can I shoot it?" asked Scout. It's just one of those things that puts a smile on your face.

Scout climbed out of the car and took up a position using the car's bonnet as a rest. Unfortunately, she missed with her first shot. Giving her some encouragement, I told her to take another shot but to slow down and remember to control her breathing. The next shot stopped the hare in its tracks with a good headshot. And this situation was repeated two more times in quick succession. Scout's first game kills and all clean shots. That smile on my face still hasn't disappeared.

On the way back to camp, there were a couple of longer shots available that weren't ideal for Scout. So, I notched up a couple more hares, and it wasn't until 1.30am that I finished skinning and gutting them all. Then they were neatly bagged-up in the Engel 40L fridge, set to freezer mode. In dealing with the game, I'd taken real care of Scout's first hare and sent off the skin to Tarween Taxidermy when we got home. It's great to have the fragile and thin skin tanned as a memento for her first game kill. I also marked the freezer bag which held the hare itself. It subsequently became hare and mushroom pie which

was enjoyed all the better for knowing that Scout had achieved the wild harvest.

Target practice

A fantastic opportunity on a rural property is to increase your familiarity and proficiency with your own firearm, even if you've already done so at a SSAA rifle range. On arrival, I'd asked the farmer if there was a suitable location to zero-in a rifle and he provided the perfect spot.

I'd had a pair of matching rifles built, in .308 Win for me and .223 Rem for Scout, and while Scout had spent time at our local SSAA range using my Lithgow Slazenger .22LR, she'd not yet used her .223. That's because I wanted her to gain familiarity with firearms using a single-shot bolt-action firearm with open sights, before moving her onto telescopic sights with the SportCo. Also, for Scout to share her first experience with her Poppy around, after all, he was the one who instructed me on firearms when I was a kid.

While I'd already put three rounds through her rifle at my local SSAA range to make sure I knew where the fall of shot was, zeroing the Bushnell Engage 3-9x40 scope was going to be all up to Scout. And I was super proud to be the person showing her how it was done – and to do that in front

of my own dad. I had every confidence that she'd be well positioned to generate the skills to ensure she, like me, could contribute to humane vertebrate pest management efforts in her own right. But even I was surprised at how well she performed.

Scout achieved a grouping the size of a 50-cent piece – 1" high at 50m – and she did it twice! Dad and I were absolutely delighted. And what a wonderful way to pass by the heat of the day. ■



Scott and his dad returning from a morning's perambulation.



Daddy-daughter time zeroing the Bushnell Engage 3-9x40 to Scout's Rem Model 700 20" heavy barrel in .223.



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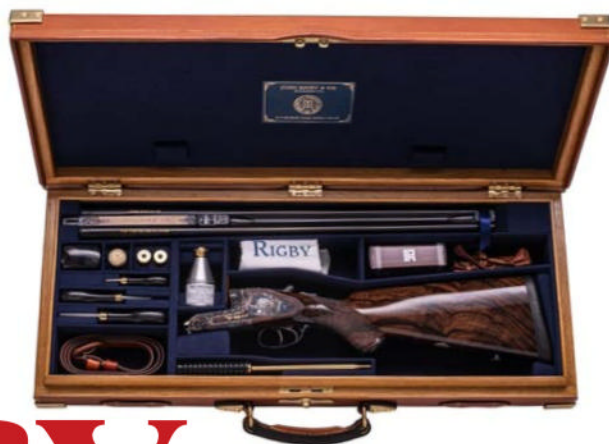
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JOHN RIGBY & CO.

history happily repeating itself!



Johan van Wyk reports on a Rigby renaissance that has benefitted the whole community

Mention the name of London gunmakers John Rigby & Co. and visions of adventures in far-off lands filled with dangerous beasts such as man-eating tigers in the forests of India or cantankerous buffalo bulls in the African bush are conjured up. As the oldest gunmakers in continuous existence in the English-speaking world, Rigby can trace their history back to humble beginnings in Dublin, Ireland, in 1775.

In 1865, Rigby opened a retail outlet in London. Business was no doubt good, and as London was at the time gaining a well-earned reputation as the mecca of fine gunmaking, the move to London was timely. The Dublin works would eventually only be closed in 1897, with Rigby hereafter based exclusively in London.

Although Rigby gained fame during the 1870s for their prowess at building match rifles, 1879 would see the introduction of a

classic design that is once more in production after a hiatus of more than a century: the rising-bite sidelock action, patent No 1141 of 1879.

I doubt if they realised it at the time, but John Rigby & Co. turned the big-game hunting world on its head in 1898 when they took a leap of faith and introduced a new cartridge: the .450 Nitro-Express (NE). The .450 NE was based on an existing black powder cartridge, the .450 Black Powder Express (BPE), but the addition of a heavier brass case (3¼" in length), modern jacketed bullets and nitro powder (in this instance, 70gr of cordite, a recent development that consisted of 58 per cent nitro-glycerine, 37 per cent gun cotton, and 5 per cent Vaseline) boosted the ballistics of the new cartridge considerably. The .450 BPE typically fired a 325gr paper-patched lead bullet at about 1800fps, but the .450 NE launched a 480gr jacketed bullet (either a conventional soft-nose or a non-expanding solid) at an almost breathtaking 2150fps.

Rigby's chosen ballistics for their .450 NE was no coincidence, though. Its 480gr bullet at 2150fps delivered just about 5000ft/lbs of energy, which is very close to the energy figures quoted at the time



The simple yet elegant lines of the Highland Stalker are evident, and as the name suggests, it is a practical hunting and stalking rifle.

A current-production rising-bite sidelock Rigby double rifle featuring custom engraving and a fitted oak-and-leather case, chambered for the .577 NE.



John Rigby & Co. – history happily repeating itself

for the 8-bore rifle with a suitable loading, one of their more popular black powder dangerous-game chamberings. What Rigby did by modernising an existing black powder cartridge was to repack-age the 8-bore in a rifle that was at least 5lbs lighter, a lot handier and quicker into action, and recoiled considerably less. The shooting world took note and would never be the same again.

The .450 NE made the black powder-loaded large bores obsolete overnight. It instantly became the tool of choice for the professional and amateur hunter alike, and I suspect Rigby did brisk business with orders for rifles chambered for the new cartridge. The other English gunmakers were fast to follow in Rigby's footsteps. Holland & Holland introduced a .450-calibre Nitro-Express of their own, the .500/450 NE. It was ballistically identical to the Rigby round but used a bottlenecked case (a necked-down .500 3¼" case) with larger internal capacity and thus slightly lower chamber pressure. It was, just like the Rigby offering, a nitro-powered version of an existing black powder cartridge, the .500/450 Magnum BPE. The .450 No 2 NE, developed by Eley, was introduced by WJ Jeffery & Co. It used a massive 3½" case for even lower chamber pressure.

As a firm, John Rigby & Co. was no stranger to advanced developments in the field of rifles. The third John Rigby himself was, from 1887 to 1894, the Superintendent of the Royal Arms Factory at Enfield. When the barrels of the early Lee-Metford rifles were found to wear out alarmingly fast under service conditions, the cure was a change to square-grooved rifling in place of the earlier elliptical Metford-type rifling. This period saw the introduction of smokeless propellant for the .303 in place of the heavily compressed charges of black powder used in the cartridge up to this point, and John Rigby played a vital role in both of these developments.

Following on the heels of the .450 NE, 1899 saw the introduction of the rimmed .400/350 NE cartridge by Rigby for use in double and single-shot rifles. Double and single-shot rifles were expensive, though, and Rigby turned to their new-found partners in Germany, the Mauser-Werke

in Oberndorf, for a more affordable solution. Mauser accepted the challenge and responded by adapting their existing Siamese Mauser action that was designed for use with the rimmed 8x50R cartridge. Mauser lengthened the standard-length M98 Mauser action by approximately a quarter of an inch, and a special, sloped magazine box and modified extractor claw made it possible to feed the rimmed .400/350 NE cartridges from the Mauser action's magazine.

Mauser called the new action the M98 Magnum Mauser action, and it quickly became the platform for what is arguably Rigby's most famous cartridge: the .416 Rigby. The .416 fired a 410gr bullet at 2370fps, and this load generated 5000ft/lbs of muzzle energy. This placed the .416 in the same class as most of the popular British Nitro-Express double rifle cartridges such as the .470 NE and others. Combined with excellent non-expanding, steel-jacketed bullets loaded in the factory ammunition of the time, the .416 Rigby quickly gained an excellent reputation for use on dangerous game.

The slightly longer Magnum Mauser action made the development of cartridges like the .416 Rigby a possibility. Mauser designed a magazine box specifically for

the .416, along with a strengthened magazine floorplate, and the combination soon proved popular. Original Rigby rifles in .416 Rigby are today rare and valuable; hardly surprising since only 189 of them were made up to the outbreak of World War Two in 1939. They are highly prized by collectors and are rarely offered for sale.

Rigby was appointed as the Mauser-Werke's exclusive agents in 1898, a relationship that persisted until 1912. This meant that they had the rights to sell Mauser rifles, actions, and other components in Britain and the colonies. Their subsequent close collaboration with Mauser on the designs described before should therefore be no surprise. Rigby even adopted the 7x57 Mauser cartridge as a standard chambering, renaming it the .275 Rigby. The .275 Rigby was a favourite of W.D.M. Bell, the famed Scottish hunter who used the rather diminutive .275 for a lot of his hunting, including numerous elephants. Another well-known user of the .275 was Jim Corbett, the famed hunter of man-eaters in India.

During the 1920s and 1930s, and despite the ravages of the Great Depression, the British gun trade continued to manufacture the finest sporting arms of the time. Wealthy clients from India and elsewhere



Highland Stalker (top) and a Big Game (below). Both feature additional engraving and upgraded wood.

kept order books turning over, and demand from Africa and India for quality and reliable hunting arms stayed strong. Things changed rather drastically on September 1, 1939, however.

The British economy was placed on a war footing to support the war effort, and the British gunmakers found themselves doing work in support of the British Armed Forces instead of making fine guns and rifles for sportsmen around the world. When the guns eventually fell silent in 1945, the world had changed, and not necessarily for the better for the British gun trade. Britain was a bleak place for many years after the war's end, with rationing in place and the grey cloud of war debts to be paid off. Big-game hunting certainly wasn't a priority during this time.

For Rigby, the situation was without doubt even worse. The Mauser factory in Germany, on which they depended for their supply of bolt-action rifles, was destroyed by occupying French forces in 1946, and with it went the commercial M98 Mauser action, tragically. During the post-war years, Rigby had to use what actions they could get hold of to keep, especially, the .416 Rigby alive, and they even went so far as to modify standard-length M98 actions for the .416, an unwise but probably desperate attempt to keep the doors open. When the French-made Brevox Mauser action came along in the 1950s Rigby had access to a Magnum-sized M98 action again, but the Brevox didn't linger for long, and only about 50 .416s were made on the Brevox by Rigby.

A 1953-vintage Rigby .416 owned by a friend of mine is perhaps the best illustration of just how desperate Rigby was to keep producing .416s during this period. The rifle is made on a Frankenstein Mauser action; two standard-length M98 actions had been welded together to form one Magnum-length action. Functionally, the rifle performs flawlessly, but the amount of work involved is considerable.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Rigby survived, but only just. In the 1980s, however, things changed when the grand old company was acquired by Paul Roberts. Paul, who traded under the name of J Roberts & Son, had been contracted to



Rigby's Marc Newton (right) on the shooting range with Tom Auger (left) of Pro-Tactical. In the centre is David Auger, Tom's late father, who was instrumental in reestablishing the Rigby brand in Australia.



The recently resurrected Rigby/Bissell-patent rising-bite action was initially used from 1879 to 1912. Pictured is a .303 double rifle from 1898.

build rifles for Rigby, and bought the Rigby name and ledgers in 1984. He set out to restore the Rigby name and, in addition to fine double rifles, made big-game bolt-action rifles on all manner of actions, including modified Brno ZKK-602 actions.

In 1995, Rigby even introduced a new cartridge: the .450 Rigby Rimless. It was conceived by necking up a .416 Rigby case to take a .458" bullet, and although it isn't as popular as the .416 Rigby it has a fair following with professional hunters in Africa and elsewhere where dangerous game is hunted.

In 1998, Rigby entered what many Rigby aficionados regard as the company's

darkest period. In this year, the company's name and records were bought by an American individual, and production was moved to northern California. Many grandiose claims were made about the so-called 'Cali-Rigby' offerings, but the reality was that their build quality was rather lacklustre. Many of the traditional (and proven) English gunmaking techniques were discarded, and double rifles based on remanufactured shotgun actions sourced from Germany became the reality. The result was sad and inevitable, and the once-proud name of Rigby became somewhat of a joke in the rifle community.

John Rigby & Co. – history happily repeating itself!

In 2010, and to salvage the Rigby name, the company's name and ledgers were bought back by a Dallas, Texas-based investment group. Paul Roberts was once again contracted to make the rifles to be sold under the Rigby name. Alas, the arrangement was short-lived, and in 2013, Rigby changed hands again, this time to the L&O Group from Germany, owners of such other well-known brands as Blaser, Sauer and Mauser. After many years apart, it looked like Rigby and Mauser would once again commence their successful collaboration of old. As things turned out, this is exactly what happened.

Marc Newton, a former employee of Paul Roberts and a passionate admirer of Rigby guns and rifles, was appointed as managing director, and I'm happy to report that Rigby is flourishing under Marc's dynamic leadership. The revered rising-bite double rifle and shotgun is, more than a century after production was originally halted, again in production and available to those who desire one. A new and more affordable boxlock-actioned double rifle, the Shikari, has recently been released, so just as in the past, Rigby is again offering big-game double rifles on both types of actions.

As for bolt-action rifles, Rigby's bread-and-butter product here is the Big Game model. It is available in .375 H&H, .416

Rigby, .404 Jeffery, and .450 Rigby, and in three distinct configurations as well. The PH model is intended to be a practical working rifle for those who don't require extra embellishment but demand functionality and reliability, while the Vintage model (available only in .416 Rigby) is intended to cater for those with more traditional taste in rifles. Single square-bridge models are intended for use with open sights, while double square-bridge versions can be fitted with quick-detachable scope mounts. Individual preferences and embellishments such as engraving and upgraded wood are available, and Rigby will gladly quote an individual client in this regard. Standard barrel lengths are either 22" or 24", depending on the model.

For those whose hunting needs dictate the use of a smaller-calibre rifle, the Highland Stalker fits the bill. It is available in .275 Rigby, .308 Winchester, .30-06 Springfield, 8x57JS Mauser, and 9.3x62 Mauser and is styled very much like Rigby's earlier .275s that were carried by the likes of Bell and Corbett. As they are intended as hunting rifles primarily, the Highland Stalker features a slim-profile 23" barrel, but a Ladies' model is available as well, fitted with a 22" barrel to shave off a few extra ounces.

The Magnum model is aimed at those who do their shooting at longer range. As

the name suggests, it is chambered for cartridges with a bit more power and carries a heavier-profile 25" barrel. As this model will invariably be scoped, it is supplied without open iron sights. As with the Big Game, a whole range of options are available to customers who wish to enhance their Highland Stalker.

Rigby's current flagship bolt-action is the London Best and they are uncompromising best-quality rifles built according to individual clients' requirements. The London Best is intended to compete with the absolute best bolt-action rifles being produced in Britain and elsewhere today, and the fact that they have an unusual amount of time and effort expended upon them is reflected in the price. The price for the London Best is therefore intended as a baseline only as individual clients will no doubt have preferences of their own that will be added to suit their individual tastes.

The London Best Vintage is particularly soft on the eye, available only in .275 Rigby, .350 Rigby and .416 Rigby, styled according to pre-World War II specifications.

Since their renaissance, Rigby has gained a reputation for making limited-edition rifles. These include falling-block single-shot rifles chambered for the latest Rigby cartridge, the rimmed .416 No 2, as well as bolt-action rifles. Of particular interest here in Australia is the Rigby Big Game Australian Water Buffalo special edition. These rifles (only five were made) feature Australian-themed engraving and are chambered in .450 Rigby. I'm sure we will see many limited-edition Rigby rifles in the future.

After decades out in the proverbial cold, John Rigby & Co. (Gunmakers) Ltd is back to what they did best all those years ago – making some of the finest hunting rifles available. The company's historic collaboration with Mauser and their superb M98 action has been resurrected as well, and if you buy a new Rigby today, it will once again be built on a German-made M98 Mauser action. This is a case of history repeating itself, but in an incredibly positive way!

Rigby guns and rifles are imported into Australia by Pro-Tactical, headquartered in Brisbane. Visit them at protactical.com.au

au ■



A limited run of Rigby falling-block single-shot rifles chambered in the new .416 Rigby No 2 cartridge was recently offered to Rigby aficionados. Pictured (below) with a Highland Stalker with extra engraving and upgraded wood.



SABATTI ROVER MASTER EVERY SHOT

The new Sabatti Rover action is a completely new design, made out of a solid billet of high-strength 7075 aluminum alloy, precision machined to minimize manufacturing-induced tolerances, then hard anodized. The receiver comes with an integral Picatinny rail allowing the mount of riflescopes or other aiming devices.

The new Sabatti Rover bolt is CNC machined from a bar of steel. The quality of this new three lugs, 60° opening throw bolt, along with a new sturdy extractor and a removable knob, make the new Sabatti Rover action one of the best currently available in the market.



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.30-06 Springfield | .308 Winchester

FEATURES

- Three lugs, 7075 aluminum alloy action
- Standard trigger
- Cold hammer forged barrel, standard rifling
- 3 shots removable polymer magazine
- Two positions safety, with bolt stop
- Polymer stock

24 INCH BARREL



ROVER ALASKAN WITH AICS MAGAZINE

\$2,190 SRP

CALIBRES

7mm Remington Magnum
.30-06 Springfield | .308 Winchester
.300 Winchester Magnum
.338 Winchester Magnum

FEATURES

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- Standard trigger
- Cold hammer forged barrel, standard rifling
- Muzzle brake (Jet-Brake)
- 7 shot AICS (308 calibre model)
- 3 shot magazine all other models
- Two positions safety, with bolt stop
- Adjustable sights
- Polymer stock



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A man wearing a wide-brimmed hat, a green utility vest over a short-sleeved shirt, and dark shorts is walking away from the camera on a dry, cracked, and muddy landscape. He is carrying a black bag or jacket in his left hand. In the background, there is a body of water and a line of trees under a clear blue sky. The ground is dark and uneven, with visible cracks and some debris.

BIG GULF COUNTRY BOARS

It's stinkin' hot but
Dick Eussen pushes
through to come
out on top



It was hot, blazingly hot, as is expected in mid-November in the northern Gulf Country, a time when people with self-preservation relax in their air-conditioned homes instead of chasing boars about drying stock dams.

Lucky John Stirrup and I had the relative comforts of the station quarters and my air-conditioned Toyota HiLux for some respite from the trying heat. Overhead the sky had turned white, yet there were no clouds on the horizon, the harbingers of summer storms that signal the build-up of the wet season. Nothing, just endless sunshine that hit 42C by 11am and continued until 4pm. There was a little hope one morning when a cloudy sky turned into an amazing display of colour as the sun peered over the horizon, but an hour later it burned the promising clouds up.

We were on a three-day hunting trip hoping to shoot big boars. They don't wander too far from water at this time of the year. And they did not, as we soon discovered on arrival at the station.

After dropping unneeded gear off at the quarters, we headed out to a series of dams by mid-afternoon. There were a few water birds and ducks, but the dams were devoid of hogs. We turned toward the river and dropped a couple of cherabin pots in. Cherabin are big and tasty freshwater prawns highly sought after by people when camping along tropical rivers.

Unlike the drying dams, the river was still running well. The property has 70km of the river running through it. Pigs congregate about the stream, but it's hard yakka walking along the rock-studded shores and under the thick scrub and paperbark trees, especially when it's so hot. So, we decided to stick to patrolling the 30-odd stock dams on the 22,000 km2 station.

Day one of hunting

The sun had lost a little heat when I pulled up alongside a herd of bellowing Brahman cattle gathered by a feed bin holding stock lick, a food that sustains them during the height of the dry season and helps to break down the dry grasses they eat. They took no notice of the HiLux, probably thinking more food was arriving.

Below us was a big enduring dam where ducks and waterfowl were active. But it was the area behind the dam wall with a big patch of thick scrub, mostly introduced rubber vine, that was our goal. John, who was carrying my .308 Sako Finnlight, walked down the dam wall into the scrub, while I stalked along the top of it.

A shot suddenly erupted the torpor, and instantly alert, I waited for pigs to break from cover into the open country beyond, but nothing happened. I called out to John, who was about 30m away, but totally hidden by the scrub.

"You got one?"

"Yes, a nice boar."

"Okay, I am coming down."

I found John standing alongside a good boar that had succumbed to a 150gr Nosler Ballistic Tip. We dragged it out and took photos before making our way out of the cover. We had only walked a few metres when we were alerted to rustling behind us. Turning around, rifles coming to battery, we saw the rear end of a big boar rushing away in the scrub, but he was too fast and vanished in a second.

That sort of thing happens when it is hot, the hogs lay up in thick cover and must be flushed out like quail. This one had been within 15m from us the whole time, yet we had not seen it in the dark shadows of the undergrowth. By the time we walked back to the HiLux the sun had set.

Day two

We were in the bush early. But the first couple of dams proved fruitless before we saw a big boar having a mud bath in another. John took him out with a good 150m shot. We walked across the dam with thick scrub below. Suddenly it erupted as several pigs rushed down the gully. We only got a brief look at them as they vanished into the dry stream.

After dragging the boar from the water and taking photos of the stinking pig, we headed to the next dam, only to have another mob of pigs rush out and flee into the scrub. It was becoming frustrating.

Other dams proved fruitless, though I missed an easy shot at a sow before we drove across a high mountain range into another valley. The first dam was almost

Big Gulf Country boars

dry and while there were signs of pigs, we failed to see any. I dropped John off at the top of the next big dam so that he could walk upstream and check out the cover. I drove on for about 400m, parked among bellowing cattle that were gathered about a feed bin, and climbed down a steep slope below the scrubby dam wall.

I saw movement about 10m away, the flick of an ear of a pig that was looking directly at me. I had set the 1x4 Leupold European scope to its lowest setting, enabling me to pick the animal up as I

quickly raised my .308 Remington 7600 Camo rifle, squeezed the trigger and ended a big sow with a 150gr Nosler Ballistic Tip. I use the same load in both of my .308 rifles.

I worked this load up using 46gr of ADI 2208 powder, primed by a CCI Large Rifle Primer. At the time the weather was cool, below 30C, but I noted a slight cratering on the primer when I used the ammo in the trying 42C conditions. Nothing to worry about as the cases ejected easily in the Remington, while the Sako-fired shells were normal. Still, it indicates that temperature

conditions must be taken into consideration when loadings are at the top of the recommended listings in some rifles. I will be dropping the load down by half a grain next time. The hogs won't know the difference.

I ejected the shell, pocketed it and saw movement on the dam wall, 20m away. A big boar stood there, looking at me. He dropped like a rock when I shot him. I stalked further into the thick scrub but saw no more game. I made my way back across the dam where John was checking out the boar I shot.

After more photos with my Nikon Z6 mirrorless camera, we moved on, checking out two more dams, before ending our drive on the river for a welcome lunch and a spell under the shady Melaleuca trees. Both of us avoided as much contact with the pigs as possible as they smelled of carrion, with most covered in stinking mud and rotten flesh. Not something you can wash off in the bush, though we did so when near the vehicle, which has a water tank.

Later, with the sun sliding down into the west we drove back to the station. John took a nice boar that was having a mud tub before we decided to call it a day and cool down. The manager dropped by and after some beverages and a feed, it was late in the night when we hit the sack.

Day three

After a light breakfast we were back on the track. At the end of the day, we had covered 150km on rough bush tracks that led across high mountain ranges, wormed past termite cities and snaked through stunted tropical woodlands. But the HiLux took it all in its stride as I pushed it across washed-out gullies, sandy creeks and around fallen trees.

We encountered much wildlife, antilopine wallaroos were everywhere on top of the hills in search of a cool breeze while doves and little, but shy, Gouldian and black-throated finches fed on grass seeds on the track. Squatter pigeons reluctantly fluttered away or risked being run over. Gouldian finches were recently discovered on the station. They appear to have escaped their endangered status in the north to become a more common sighting across the tropics.



A sow heading for cover – she failed.



John drags a big boar from a dam.

I parked the HiLux about 200m away from a drying dam where antilopine wallaroos were drinking from it. I 'shot' a few with my Nikon D500 and the Nikon 200–500mm lens. I enjoy photographing wildlife as much as hunting and fishing. This part of the Gulf Country has plenty of wildlife and I often spend more time photographing wildlife than hunting pigs.

The bottom of the dam wall was covered with thick rubber vine, yet another introduced species that has gone rampant in the northern Gulf Country. We walked onto

the dam wall and peered into the thick brush. Suddenly there was movement as two good pigs erupted from it and fled into the bush. I fired two shots, John one – and we both missed easy 20m targets.

The same happened to me three more times during the early part of the day before I took out two big running boars at 200m.

No doubt the 'cooling session' the previous evening had something to do with my early morning misses. I missed four simple shots at good boars that morning, though John was in better shape and took out three

boars with the Sako at long range across the bonnet, all of them having a mud bath. Oddly, unlike previous hunts, we shot mostly boars, as sows were largely missing in action.

Pigs wallow on dam edges and dig out large holes that are full of sloppy mud. The mud holes trap cattle that drink from the dams. Unless discovered early and pulled out they die a lingering death. Earlier in the year I shot a big boar that was eating the rear end of a bogged cow, while she was still alive!

John had brought along his .58 calibre black powder Pedersoli Kodiak double-barrel rifle. He wanted to blood it, but due to the slow process of reloading it he had up until now gladly accepted my offer to use the Sako. But I knew of a small soak below a dam wall where he might just get a pig with his own rifle.

The soak is in a deep steep gully. We stalked to it and saw movement below in a shallow pool. John aimed at a boar that was blissfully slumbering below in the cool sandy water, unaware of its impending doom.

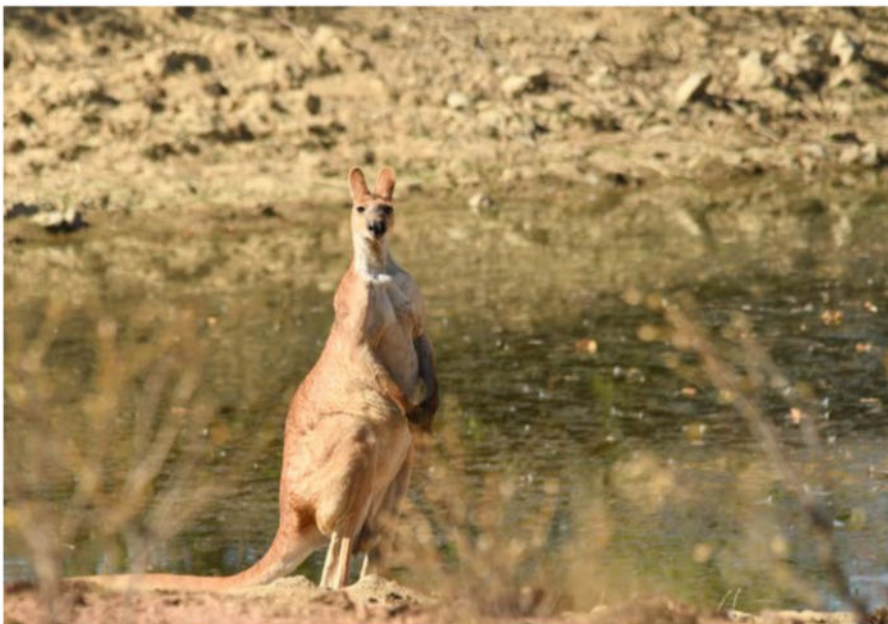
'Boom', brimstone and blue smoke engulfed us. Some 15m below in the soak, the pig kicked out his back legs and died, the 500gr lead bullet killing it instantly. It never ceases to amaze me that big lead bullets kill so well. I have used them in .44–40s and the .45–70 and seen a mate with a single-shot .50 calibre Hawken rifle drop pig after pig. He shot donkeys, brumbies, camels, scrub bulls and big horned water buffaloes on a Top End trip with the same rifle, all one-shot kills.

I took a running shot at a big boar at the next dam, a solid hit, but it took off into the thick bush. We followed close behind it and split up when the cattle pad that it was on divided. I found the boar piled up in a gully, a heart shot that had set the adrenalin surging through its body and enabled it to rush away. That sometimes happens when an animal is shot in the heart.

Later in the day, after collecting five big cherabin and the pots, we managed some more pigs before heading back to the station for some super-cold drinks as we celebrated the end of yet another successful hunt. In all we ended up with 17 pigs, mostly big tusky boars. ■



Drying dams and cloudless skies.



A giant buck antilopine wallaroo seemingly poses for the camera.



The wild hogstack

Kath Heiman puts together pulled pork burgers for the whole family to enjoy

While my family has hunted many wild pigs in its time, I've never had reason to cook the pork – until recently.

Generally, the feral pigs have been grown adults with good reasons to keep them off the dinner table. When they're left with access to the wrong food types, wild pigs are a well-known vector for some nasty transmissible diseases. And they can also harbour and transmit a range of parasites, particularly when they co-mingle with commercial livestock. Parasites in their muscles, gastrointestinal tract and organs can be passed along to humans through unhygienic handling and failing to properly cook the meat. And the older the animal gets, the higher the parasite load can become, because they've simply had more exposure time. But the situation was a lot different when my husband Scott returned from a hunt on a friend's 1500-acre property.

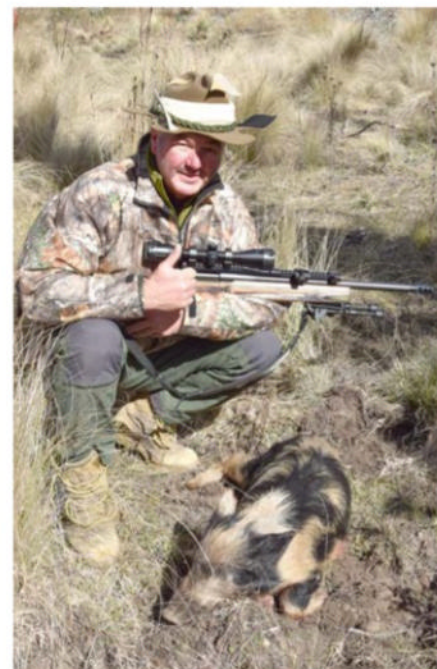
For one, the land hasn't had livestock on it for over 30 years, and the nearest property that does is on the other side of a mountain range. The property is also somewhat of an island, surrounded by a nature reserve and state conservation areas. These factors promise to lower the parasitic load of the environment, putting the odds in favour of young animals being

uninfected. And the feral pig that Scott had dropped, with his customised Remington 700 in .308 Win, was a little fella. At around 4–6 months old, it was weaned but still hanging around with the sow free-ranging. Given that wild pigs can live for 4–10 years depending on the environment, getting such a young one meant it would be perfect for wild harvest. Weighing 40–50kg, it was just a bit smaller than most farmed pigs sent for slaughter, called a 'grower' in the meat industry.

When field dressing, Scott closely checked the condition of the whole animal, paying particular attention to the health of its internal organs. Happy with what he saw, he popped everything but the head and trotters into the Engel and headed home. Which is how I found myself in the kitchen working out what to do with it next.

Looking at the meat, there were two features that stood it apart from supermarket pork. One was the colour. The muscle was red rather than pale pink. This is due to several reasons. Wild pigs have a varied diet that includes roots, nuts, fruits and small animals. This results in a meat richer in protein and iron than farmed pork, which in turn contributes to the meat's unique flavour and darker colour. The second feature was the relative lack of fat,

with no fatty deposits around the joints, and virtually no marbling within the meat itself. This little piggy had evidently led a remarkably active life foraging. Having had more exercise than its farm dwelling counterparts, the firmer meat was clearly leaner and more muscular. With comparatively little saturated fat and cholesterol,



This little piggy didn't make it to market.



Use two forks to shred the soft juicy flesh.

I was confident it would make a healthy meal. Cooking it in the slow cooker was likely to be the best way to break down the connective tissue, also ensuring that any undetected parasitic nasties were killed off by a few hours at 100 degrees.

As for the recipe, the result is spectacular. The pork comes out succulent and tender without being fatty, while the flavour is mild and savoury but not at all 'gamey.' A sweetness is created by the searing process and inclusion of leeks, barbecue sauce and cherries. Partnered with the fresh produce, brioche buns and a bottle of pinot noir, this meal is an absolute winner.



Searing the meat holds in moisture and flavour.

Ingredients

- 1-2 cuts of wild harvested pork
- cooking oil (with a high smoke point – eg, canola or sunflower)
- 1 onion or leek, chopped
- ¼ cup barbecue sauce
- dash of apple cider vinegar
- stock to cover the meat
- handful of cherries (stones removed)
- seasoning to taste (eg, salt, pepper, BBQ seasoning)
- brioche buns (enough to feed your hungry hoard)
- spread for the buns (eg, homemade beetroot dip)

Sliced:

- cheese (eg, Tilba Dairy Vintage Applebox Smoked)
- tomato
- avocado
- gherkin
- lettuce
- pineapple rings (grilled).

Method

1. Sear the joints of meat in a frypan over a high heat in a little cooking oil and with a shake of seasoning.
2. Place the chopped leek/onion in the base of the slow cooker crock pot.
3. Once seared, remove the meat from the

frypan and place it on top of the leek.

4. Add the barbecue sauce, apple cider vinegar, cherries and more seasoning then cover with stock.
5. Cook on low for around 6 hours, or until the meat starts to separate from the bone.
6. Once the pork is cooked, take it out of the slow cooker, remove the bones and shred the meat with two forks.
7. Assemble all the ingredients on a platter and let the family grab what they want. ■



Wild harvested, homegrown and homemade – now that's a burger!

What's in a flier?



A small scale is useful for weighing primers and projectiles.

Matthew Cameron ponders the unknown and ends up right back where he started

If you own a rifle, somewhere along the way you will shoot a group, or groups, either for accuracy or load development. Realistically, the most common reason projectiles refuse to group is that the twist rate of the rifling is incompatible with the projectile. The twist rate for a projectile is a function of projectile speed and its length. It's a problem common for older cartridges confronted with modern projectiles of greater weight within the calibre, propelled by modern, slower powders. Very few rifle manufacturers have allowed for this fact, even though the cartridges concerned can handle the bigger projectiles.

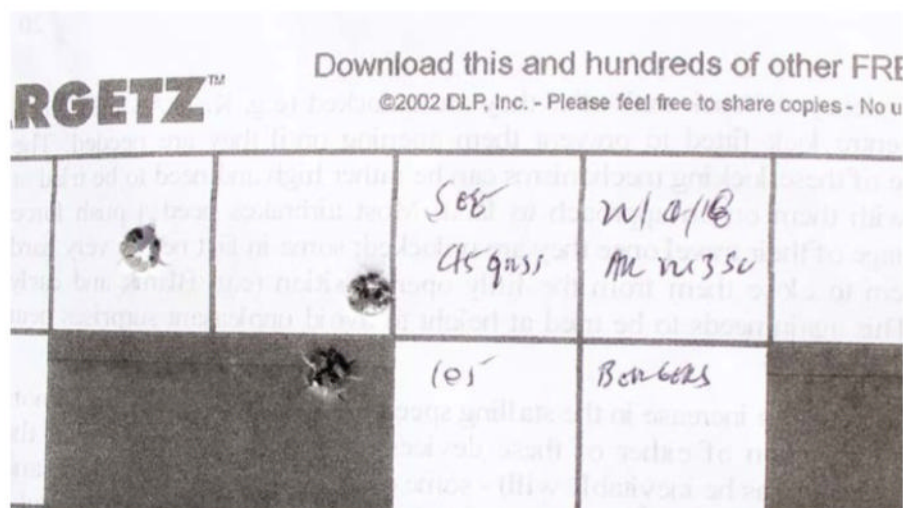
There are many reasons why a particular load is accurate. The aggregation of these positive reasons results in a tight group. It is, therefore, reasonable to conclude that there are a similar number of negative reasons that produce a less-than-acceptable group, including the inevitable 'flier'.

Fliers are a complicated subject, and the causes are not well known. The biggest issue with fliers and poor groups could be the human element. Are we willing to admit that, perhaps we, the shooter, are the real cause of the problem? In that last group that contained a flier, did we hold the rifle the same as the previous two shots? Was the

rifle set up on the bags in the same position? Although we may be loath to admit it, perhaps being human plays a much more important role than we realise.

It is claimed that if the group is vertical, more powder is required. If the group is horizontal, the projectile was driven sideways by the wind, or it was a sighting problem. I am not convinced. If the wind is almost non-existent or zero, and the sight picture is correct at the time the trigger breaks, what then causes a mysterious flier?

It has happened to us all at one stage or another and will continue to do so. However, recently we were attempting to develop a load using a commercial hunting projectile. The initial groups were great but the subsequent proof groups were both unacceptable. The velocities were all extremely similar, there was no wind and the sight picture was correct... so, why? The short answer is that we simply don't know. There must have been other unidentified reasons.



Was this flier a sighting error or caused by wind?

So, we conducted a series of tests, with different calibres, projectiles and their weights and lengths tested. We found that projectile length and distance from the base to the ogive both varied about 0.008". However, despite variations, groups were tight at times and presented a flier at others.

In researching the problems associated with groups and fliers, there are certainly no easy answers. You can have the best equipment and take exceptional care to develop your ammunition and still there will be fliers at odd intervals. The more groups you shoot the greater the odds that you will shoot a flier. While premium hunting projectiles usually do what they are designed for, the distribution of components within the projectile does not always provide the best possible accuracy.

Another subject relates to the weighing of primers. It is claimed that there is a direct relationship between the heaviest primers and the highest velocity. Although minute, in conjunction with other unmeasurable items, they combine to either produce an acceptable result or shoot a group

with or without a flier. The variation we found by weighing was 0.14 of a grain for a particular brand of benchrest primers.

Previously, we had on odd occasions weighed projectiles but never measured them, assuming that all were equal. Just what part or portion these dimensional variations play in the causing of fliers I am unable to quantify. The same applies to projectile weight variations, we simply don't know. If, as suggested, many small factors contribute to the overall accuracy and/or fliers, how are we going to measure such items? Do we need to change how we develop ammunition for testing?

It is thought that the slow increase in speed was due to increasing barrel fouling – all shots were fired at a comfortable pace. According to our extensive reloading records, where the extreme spread (ES) is less than 20fps, there is a 57 per cent probability of the subsequent group being less than an average of 0.60". Certainly, since we began annealing each case, every time it comes across the reloading bench there is a documented drop in ES over all calibres



According to convention, this load needs more powder.

that we load for. We also noticed over several calibres that either within a group or groups, the lowest ES normally had the smallest group. The difference was tiny, but it was there. Again, one small factor contributes to overall accuracy.

It's enough to convince me that a low ES is a contributor to reducing group size. Exactly what causes fliers continues to be investigated. ■

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EAT THE INVADERS

Travis Allen watches season 1 of a TV show putting Australia's invasive species on the menu

In case you missed it, 'Eat the Invaders' is an ABC show that kicked off earlier this year, with the complete season available to stream for free on ABC iView. Not an original idea, as a quick google search will show you, but interesting and entertaining, nonetheless. There are six episodes, starting with rabbit, followed by carp, cane toad, camel, cat and deer.

The show is based around two things. How to deal with an introduced animal, can it be done by eating it? Ideally to eradicate, but we'll accept controlling the numbers. Secondly, what kind of weird fancy meal can it be turned into? If you have ever seen Heston Blumenthal, this is the feel they are aiming for with that.

Host Tony Armstrong travels Australia looking for these invaders, talking to locals, scientists and anyone who has tried eating that animal before. Each episode generally follows a pattern: history lesson,

catching the invader, cooking it as an everyday meal, taste testing, researcher/scientist input and a finally onto MONA for the Heston-style dining experience with a special guest/s.

For those that have never been, MONA is the Museum of Old and New Art located just outside Hobart in Tasmania. It's the largest privately funded museum in the Southern Hemisphere. To say that MONA, and its curator/artist Kirsha Kaechele are a bit different, would not be a stretch – it's kind of what makes them famous!

As you would predict there are those who don't come out of this sparkling with gold. This includes the invasive animal (although plants do get a mention) itself and the those who introduced the invader to Australia.

For those of us that partake in hunting, we are given a reasonable hearing, although unfortunately never really considered a major part of the solution. Skipping to the last episode on deer, more than a passing interest of mine, Victoria and Tasmania

get a bit of a bad rap for deer's 'game' status. As we know, being listed as a game species is about hunter management, not species protection. Welcome information, for example, would be the recent removal of bag limits for does in Tasmania, freeing up both hunters and farmers to take more animals. This would have shown an acceptance of change. Also, the offer from hunting groups to help control deer numbers that have entered national parks.

The scientists view themselves as the answer and some agree, although I'm not so sure they can do it on their own. I hope they see hunters as a piece of the complex puzzle to help bring the numbers under control.

Each episode runs for about half an hour and are well worth a watch, just take a deep breath and remember it's entertainment trying to discuss a serious topic in a limited amount of time. ■



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WHOPPING WAPITI

A trip to New Zealand is even better than
expected for **Ben Unten**



The comment from my guide, “that’s even better than I was expecting,” said it all.

A year earlier my wife and I had begun planning our first overseas holiday with our young(ish) family. Post-pandemic destinations had opened up and airlines desperate to regain money lost during global lockdown meant affordable prices. We finally settled on ‘The Land of the Long White Cloud’ and when it came to the subject of itinerary, I casually mentioned there was some “good hunting to be had out of Queenstown.” My darling wife knows full well that there is no such thing as a ‘casual’ comment from me when it comes to hunting. So, the plan was to fly into Auckland at

the tip of North Island, hire a vehicle and wind our way down to Wellington to then fly to Queenstown in the southern end of South Island. There, I would chase a New Zealand red deer or wapiti (elk), and my family would do their utmost to drain the bank account with the sites, activities and shopping in one of the most beautiful cities of the world.

I got in contact with Accurate Hunts, who had organised some Australian hunts of mine, and was pleased to discover they organise international hunts as well. After some to-ing and fro-ing, a three-day hunt was confirmed with Hunt New Zealand. As it happened, I had met the proprietor of the operation, Sheldon, some years earlier when

I was flown to NZ for their version of the SSAA SHOT Expo. At the time of planning the trip, trophies were also more affordable than usual due to a surplus, so I ended up selecting a wapiti as my target species.

Like Australia, deer were introduced to NZ by European settlers and flourished due to no real apex predators and a favourable habitat. Unlike Australia, however, they became respected as a profitable asset and NZ established itself as a genuine destination for international hunters.

After 10 days appreciating much of what the North Island had to offer, the hunt rolled around, and I was picked up by Sheldon and Nicole. We discussed what I was hoping to achieve and, as always, I was



Whopping wapiti



Flying into picturesque Queenstown.



Queenstown's renowned Lake Wakatipu.

after a 'representative' head only. My suggestion to all new trophy hunters is that it's better to keep an open mind and a broad approach in these situations. Unrealistic expectations and 'it must be X number of inches' etc can add unnecessary stress and pressure to both parties. "That shouldn't be a problem," was all Sheldon said.

As this was a family holiday and not a dedicated hunting trip, I had little hunting gear with me. It turned out that Queenstown was experiencing unseasonably warm weather, and what I did have was inappropriately hot. I ended up hunting in civvies: jeans and a shirt.

We drove for several hours out to the selected hunting block, which was selected due to game numbers and featuring rolling hills rather than vertical cliffs.

After arrival and a safety briefing, I was handed the rifle I was to use. Featuring a carbon fibre stock and carbon-fibre wrapped, match-grade barrel with a 1:8 twist, the Elevation (made by Proof out of Montana) was topped with a Swarovski Z5 3.5-18x44 scope. It was chambered in the relatively new 7 PRC, which drives a 175gr ballistic tipped projectile 3050fps. I mentioned my unfamiliarity with the calibre and was informed that it had so far accounted for three one-shot kills on wapiti, so there was no pressure... but don't stuff it up! The

rifle was fitted with a large suppressor with integral muzzle brake and my Kiwi counterparts were *again* amazed to hear that suppressors are still virtually a taboo item in Australia.

We walked for about an hour before spotting the first red deer. There's something about red deer that I always find majestic, and these animals were no exception. After some time spent glassing we pressed on. After another hour or so I laid eyes on my first wapiti. Although larger, similarities between these and the reds were immediately evident and I could see why they are capable of interbreeding. Further observation revealed that wapiti have a distinctive rear end with lighter 'bullseye' type markings. The animal in my bins was magnificent but not on my menu so we pressed on. There was more cover available than I first thought and when walking past some thick stuff I noticed tunnels in the low, dense scrub. I quietly asked if there were pigs on the property and was told that pig numbers were heavily managed, with the tunnelling made by fallow deer hiding away. I had not observed this behaviour before, but on closer inspection I noted that the tunnels were too tall to have been porcine. I still wondered how on Earth fallow bucks would get in and out of such tight spaces.

There was quite a strong breeze blowing from the north, and I asked if this was the prevailing wind. I was told that it was... until it wasn't. Right on cue the wind swirled and we heard a clatter of hooves from within the thick cover. With no chance of pursuing that animal we decided to press on, when Nicole made the spot of the day by picking up blonde antler tips through a break in the thick undergrowth. I caught a brief glimpse of 'up-periscope' type tips moving quickly through the scrub. The animal was heading southward so we followed, looking for a potential shooting window. But with only another couple of brief glimpses through the scrub, we agreed that he had bettered us. We ate a snack on the go and continued circling back toward the vehicle.

Eventually we broke free from the cover and were traversing a sphagnum moss bog when Sheldon and I spotted a bachelor mob of wapiti, causing us to freeze mid-stride. With the rut just finishing, some of the bulls were forming bachelor mobs again. Of the five bulls we could see, one was staring right at us from 250m away. Shortly every part of my body began to itch, and my legs began to cramp, but neither of us dared to move. After what seemed like an eternity the curious bull went back to grazing and we slowly and



Ben's magnificent wapiti.

silently made our way into cover. With the breeze blowing perpendicular to the deer, we quickly devised a plan to skirt the bog, keeping the scrub between us and the mob until we could get into shooting position. Eventually we slowly eased around the last stand of shrubs and the mob were in full view. After assessing each animal through the binos, the bull to the far left was the obvious shooter of the group so Sheldon set up the tripod shooting sticks and I nestled the stock in the rubber V.

We'd had a conversation on the drive out regarding the aiming point on deer. It can be a somewhat controversial topic but my preferred point of aim for a broadside animal is centre of shoulder-ball, approximately halfway up the thickness of the body, aiming for a double lung shot. Yes, you will lose some meat, but you have a comparatively larger margin of error, as when the bullet penetrates and shatters the shoulder bone the internal damage is multiplied. But I had been told that wapiti were too solid for a shoulder-ball shot. The preferred location was the more traditional one-third up from the underside of the animal, just behind the front shoulder aiming for a heart/lung shot. I began repeating this to myself to keep it in the forefront of my mind.

However, this animal was facing directly away from us. Now, if you haven't stood

on a sphagnum moss bog before, imagine standing on bad-smelling sponge which gives the appearance of being solid enough to hold your weight but in reality is trying to swallow you up like quicksand. After eight minutes of being hunched over the scope, my feet were rolling outward and my ankles, neck and back began to let me know what they thought about holding this awkward pose for an extended period. I ever-so-slowly tried to adjust my feet, and straightened my back out for a brief respite until the animal began to turn. Finally, he was broadside, but the entire front half of his body was obscured behind another big-bodied wapiti. I slipped my cheek onto the stock again and silently willed him to push slightly forward into the clear, but my prayers went unheard. The animal decided to continue his body rotation and ended up sharply quartering towards us. Although this is a routine shot, there is less margin for error. Now aware of our presence, Sheldon quietly remarked, "I think you should target that bull, Ben." I confirmed that the preferred aiming point was now just inside the close shoulder, about a third of the way up. I controlled my breathing and squeezed the trigger. The suppressor and muzzle did their job, the recoil and report felt like a .22 Mag or maybe a .223. "Great hit," I heard. "Reload." We watched

as the animal buckled up, turned a semi-circle and fell to the ground behind a small rise, just out of sight. "Really solid hit," Sheldon said. I made the rifle safe as we began walking up.

I always get a little squirt of apprehension when I lose sight of a hit animal, but I needn't have worried. He was lying within 2m of where he'd been hit – an autopsy later confirmed the precise shot placement.

As we approached, my guide uttered the opening phrase of this article, and I simply couldn't believe how big this fella was. There is no ground shrinkage with these monsters. It took three of us to move him for the photo! He ended up officially taping out at 432 and 7/8", which the director of the outfitter organisation believed to be the largest NZ wapiti ever shot by an Australian (at the time of writing). The cape is now tanned.

I cannot recommend Hunt New Zealand highly enough, everything about the organisation is friendly, proficient and professional. So, if you're weighing up the next family holiday or hunting destination, you could do a lot worse than the land of 'fush and chups'.

For more information visit **trophyhunting.co.nz** and make contact via their Australian agency at **accuratehunts.com** ■



FORGED IN FINLAND

A custom-made hunting knife from the cold north hits home for **Jan Kaptein**

Martti grinding the blade in his forge.

Scandinavian design is renowned for its 'form follows function' philosophy. Much to the benefit of hunters and outdoors enthusiasts across the globe, many knives that hail from the cold north are no exception. While I generally like Scandinavian blade design, nothing beats a custom knife that is made to your specifications. However, many bladesmiths are not young and live largely offline, which makes them notoriously hard to find. The best way is to ask around within the knife community. Doing just that got me in touch with Martti Lehtonen, who produces custom knives from his forge in Finland.

Contrary to many knifemakers from the 'old guard', Martti speaks and writes English with ease, which greatly facilitates communication. Upon request, I was provided with many photos of knives he had produced and a pretty much endless list of options for a custom product. Rather than opting for a traditional puukko design, I explained to Martti that I was after a

medium-sized hunting blade for all-round use. Other than indicating a preference for stabilised or otherwise weatherproof wooden handles over the often-used birch bark, I let him use his experience to come up with a design.

As with any custom product, the creator needs time to fabricate a knife. The custom blade by Martti was no different. It was, however, done more quickly than most custom orders I have placed, and he touched base during the process a few times to provide updates. Upon arrival, I was astounded with the knife's workmanship and design. I put it straight to use in the field, using it as my main blade for several months to see whether it worked as well as it looked.

Contrary to factory knives, there are no standard measurements or sizes. My knife is a medium-sized fixed blade that weighs in at 180/128g with and without the sheath. It measures 212mm overall, with a 94mm long blade that is 22mm wide and about 3.5mm across the spine. The blade steel

is 80CrV2, which Martti treats to get it to a hardness of about 61 HRC. During his treatment, the steel is normalised and austenitised in a heat-treating kiln, quenched



Martti with the finished knife and sheath.



Jan's custom hunter and sheath.

Forged in Finland

in fast quenching oil, then tempered in an oven. The grind is convex, with a micro-bevel edge. On blades with an unpolished finish, Martti stamps his logo, but on this particular blade, which is polished, it is electrochemically etched. The bolster is nickel-silver, and the handle is in X-cut ziricote wood (*Cordia dodecandra*). The knife came in a custom leather sheath that was handmade by Martti to exactly fit the blade. A big thumbs up on the packaging too. The knife came well protected in a box with a flyer with basic care instructions. This may just be a small detail, but it is nice and testament to the care and attention that goes into the process.

By now, the knife has seen a lot of intensive use. Fortunately, it has proven to be a joy and performed admirably. My main shooting has been a broad range of birds, with a few deer thrown in the mix to keep



Jan's custom hunter after a few months of use, note the slight patina on the wooden grip.

the local farmers happy and to restock the freezer. The slight belly of the blade makes it easy to skin larger animals and the treated 80CrV2 steel keeps its edge well. Though it is not a fully stainless steel, I have not seen any traces of oxidation, and with some basic care, you wouldn't either. It has not chipped in use, but I have not abused the knife and mainly use it to process young deer and birds as well as a few rabbits and hares. The handle is comfortable, even during prolonged use and it is sufficiently large for my sizeable hands. The ziricote wood used for the handle has natural rot-preventing properties and while not stabilised, has only gotten nicer with time. It has developed a slightly darker patina and shows no other signs of wear. The bolster has similarly developed some patina, which to me looks nice. The sheath has worked fine too and is well made. However, I have made a small sheath that just covers the blade and often carry the knife in my pack or a deep pocket on the side of my leg. This saves space and is more 'civilised' when I traverse areas where I am likely to encounter farmers and other people. Around camp, the knife is great for dinner prep and general chores.

One minor detail is that the sheath did not have a drain hole at the bottom, something worthwhile for blades that are not in fully stainless steel. I just drilled a little hole and sorted it, so not a problem.

The choice of a convex grind with a micro-bevel edge is fine and easy to get super sharp. It does require a bit of care while sharpening though, both in terms of the

micro-bevel angle and to avoid removing too much material, so a fine stone is used.

Another personal preference is to have a slightly raised finger guard. The one on this knife is fairly low, but it fits the design well. It being a smallish blade, means it will mostly see use for more delicate tasks, so I will leave it up to you to decide whether it is good or bad. One thing to keep in mind is that the knife hails from Finland, the land of the puukko, which by traditional design, has no finger guard at all.

Production time is 1-2 months, which is great for the attention to detail. This includes an early sketch of the proposed knife design to the packaging and care instructions to receiving the knife itself. Martti is proud of the knives he makes, and it shows.

Discuss with Martti what you want or need. Yes, you will end up paying more than you would for a factory knife, but in my book it is worth it. Now all I should do is convince myself that this knife is the last one I will need, but of course we all know one more knife is always better.

Prices for a typical puukko knife with an 80CrV2 blade, pressed birch bark handle and custom leather sheath start at around \$500 plus shipping. My custom knife with its one-off design and other materials was significantly pricier at \$900. A lot of that was to account for Martti's time in design and fabrication.

In case you are interested in his work, have a look at mlcustomknives.com or shoot Martti an email at mlcustomknives@gmail.com ■



The knife in sheath makes for a compact combo.

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OUTBACK BOWHUNTING

The extreme heat won't stop a trip away for
Ant Atkinson in pursuit of billy goats

Wayne with a nice billy taken
from across a tank.



After missing a few years of my annual bowhunting trip with my dad Wayne and brother Tyler in Central New South Wales, I couldn't wait to again be chasing big billies on the remote station, despite temperatures reaching above 50C.

Wayne and Tyler got up there two days before me and managed a couple of nice billies between them. Because the days are that hot, we start hunting the goats before daylight. We position ourselves around different tanks on the station and sit for the morning, allowing the goats to come to us instead of us pushing ourselves in the extreme heat trying to find them.

My first morning, Tyler and I set up on a small tank where we had a good look over the flats to the south and the bush to the north-east where we thought the goats would come in from. It didn't take long for a small mob to appear on the other side of the clearing, and they didn't waste any time making their way to the tank. I'd say there was a nanny on heat, which makes the billies push them along a bit quicker. Being my first time up there in a while I was keen to get an arrow in the air. There was a respectable billy in this mob, and if he presented a shot, I'd take it. Bow at the ready I watched them charge over the bank and down for a drink before they started to make their way back up the bank to retreat into the bush to bed up for the day.



Ant's first billy for the trip.

The target billy turned broadside and after a quick bleat from Tyler he came to a halt at 45m. I sent an arrow on its way, entering in behind the shoulder and he made it 20m before piling up under trees behind the bank.

We watched on for a few hours as different mobs of goats funnelled in and out of the tank area. Nothing massive appeared that morning but I did manage to put a shot across the dam on a curly white billy as he snuck in behind a tree. If it wasn't for Tyler getting a quick glimpse of white through the trees he probably

would have come and gone without us knowing. A short stalk to close the gap a bit and a 50m shot saw him down for the count and the first trophy-class billy for the trip.

The extreme heat meant the afternoons were spent cleaning goat skulls, yabbing and driving to different tanks to assess the goat traffic to work out where to sit the following day.

The next morning came and we were off again, this time to an old favourite of mine where on my first trip to the property I shot a monster billy over the magic 40" mark. This time I was with Wayne, and we were straight into the action watching mob after mob work their way out of the sandhills toward the tank we were positioned at. There seemed to be a hell of a lot of smaller goats compared to previous years and the big billies just weren't there.

It took a couple of hours, but I finally got a glimpse of a shooter, a big black billy making his way in with his nannies. I quickly grabbed my bow and got into position where it would be a comfortable 35m shot to the opposite side of the tank. When he eventually popped over to present a shot, I had my second trophy-class billy for the trip.

A little bit later that morning Wayne managed to sneak in and slip an arrow into a respectable billy that came in with a large mob that went just shy of trophy class.



Wayne at full draw on a trophy billy.

Outback bowhunting

The following day was an absolute scorcher with temperatures reaching well into the 50C range with horrendous wind, making it near impossible to get within range for an ethical shot.

The heatwave and wind the night before blew a bit of rain and some cooler weather through for our Friday morning hunt. The three of us decided to head back to the same tank I had sat on with Wayne two days earlier. We had shot the biggest goats we saw there but were hoping for a few more animals to wander in. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case, the cooler weather meant they didn't need to come to water. It was a slow start to the morning but eventually, after an hour or so, a loan billy made his way in. He was nothing special, but I decided I'd take him as I didn't know if that morning was going to be my last for the trip. I snuck into the dam and made a broadside shot from 35m, watching him expire a few moments later.

Wayne was yet to take a trophy-class billy this trip so when a bigger model made its way in shortly after, it was his turn to fling an arrow. We were unsure whether it would make trophy class, but he was a decent billy and well worth a stalk. Wayne made his way over the fence and down to the little hide we'd made earlier in the week, making it a perfect spot to sit and wait for the billy to pop over the bank and down to the water. A perfect 30m shot and he was down for the count. A quick measure confirmed him a trophy-class goat after all.

The goats this trip just didn't seem to be as big as the previous years. We'd been



Ant shot this curly billy as he came in to drink.

hunting for five days and hadn't seen a record-class goat between us, which was unusual for the time year. When a massive one-horned billy came in from the sand hills, Tyler just couldn't resist the urge to see if he might have gone 40" with both horns, so he slotted an arrow into him from 45m. He would've gone just shy of the magic 40" with small bases. Still a quality goat and if he had both horns would be by far the biggest one for the trip.

The decision was made to stay for one last hunt and head home that following afternoon, so that afternoon was spent

boiling and cleaning up skulls ready for the road trip home the next day.

Before we knew it the final morning was upon us and we were set up waiting before the sun came up. Another cool morning had the goats few and far between, but we finally spotted a decent billy making his way out of the thick scrub and into view. He was the best out of a bachelor mob with four or five other billies. Not massive but a respectable billy.

He made his way in quickly, not giving me much of a chance to get close so a longer shot was on the cards. At just shy of 60m, I let an arrow fly, and he hit the deck just over the dam bank.

After shooting a trophy-class goat the morning prior, Wayne had the urge to bring the longbow for a run. After a few failed stalks with the goats on high alert he finally managed to work his way around and close the gap on a small mob of billies. He positioned himself as they came back out of the tank after a drink. He had a broadside shot at 20m and made it count, securing his first kill with his new bow. A perfect way to wrap up a great trip away with great company. ■



A big one-horned billy looking cautiously before coming in to drink.



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BEHIND

the scenes

Don Caswell uncovers how to get
the most out of trail cameras

Pigs. Lots of pigs!

Trail cameras are a wonderful resource. I constantly have them in the bush to check the presence and movement of animals. They can be useful at home as well to see what has been visiting the porch and veggie garden during the night. Whether it be the camera sitting on a patio chair or one fixed to a tree in a deep, dark gorge, there is always a thrill in seeing just what images and videos have been captured.

Readily available from a variety of retail shops and online, there is a wealth of models to choose from. Prices range from \$35 to \$1000 and more. Out of curiosity, I tried a \$35 specimen and discovered that it took passable photos but was made from frail plastic, clunky to use and had a complicated programming system that had to be accessed via a computer.

Most trail cameras are made in China. The bigger well-known brands have models featuring specific geometry that identifies them at a glance. Outside of those, there are a lot of trail cameras that are 'badge engineered'. That is, the only difference between brands and models

is the company logo on the case. The design, construction and operating specs are identical.

I find that the cheaper trail cameras are often good performers and makers are quick to embrace the latest improvements in technology, presumably because there is a lot of competition in that sphere.

So how much do you need to pay for a reasonable trail camera that is easy to operate and takes good images and video? From little more than \$100 you will get a decent unit. There have been significant improvements on several trail camera aspects that greatly improve the functionality and performance of units across the price spectrum. For me, key aspects of design and technology are as follows.

Full clamshell

A design that seals the whole unit, batteries and all. Some trail cameras have their batteries in a pop-out tray. That is convenient for sure, but these trays are not sealed and invariably ants set up home in there, packing the terminal end with eggs and pupae that prevent power getting to the unit.

What's more, the viewing screen shares the same unsealed space as the batteries and the ants will set up their mini ant farms between the viewing screen and its glass window, blocking your vision of the screen readouts. In that location they are impossible to remove.

Fast trigger time down to 0.1 sec

This is essential for maximising your chances of capturing fleeting animal movements. The old trigger speeds were five seconds (some trail cameras still have that) which means that a lot can be missed between the camera sensing an animal and actually taking the photo.

Trail camera supports SD/SDHC/SDXC memory cards up to 512GB capacity

Trail cameras have long only supported memory cards to 32GB, and many still do. For a camera set to sensitive mode, with maximum image/video size, and left for a week or more, you can expect thousands of photos per day and may run out of card memory. Bigger is better.

On memory cards, I prefer full SD-sized cards because they are easier to handle in the field. If the smaller micro cards drop, they are near impossible to find in grass. If possible, check out just how easy it is to pop the SD cards in and out of the camera, remembering you will most times be doing this in the bush, not the comfort of your lounge room. Some units place their card access in the most inconvenient and hard to reach places on the camera. I swear there must be a secret competition between the makers to see who can design the most difficult card access.

Trigger detection distance to 90ft

This greatly increases your chances of obtaining images/video of that elusive critter. Early models were less the 50ft. Most are now 60ft, while the newer cameras are offering 90ft.

Standby mode power draw down to 0.1mA

This will give up to eight months operation. In really cold climates that will be less, and the manufacturers recommend the use of Li-ion batteries for such chilly weather usage. Sure, most times you will



Don uses self-tapping galvo screws and fine galvo wire to mount trail cameras.

Behind the scenes

be checking your cameras and swapping cards much more often than that. But it is convenient to avoid the need to be changing batteries often and the day will come that, for whatever reason, your camera may remain unattended for a month or two. It's nice to know it is still functioning under those circumstances.

Most makers recommend high-quality alkaline batteries and avoiding rechargeable batteries that run to slightly different voltage levels and have functionality issues. I buy AA high-performance alkaline batteries in blocks of 100, which minimises the unit cost per battery and ensures I have plenty of fresh spares on hand.

Image enhancing technology

Advancements such as Sony ultra-clear imaging technology and blur reduction, and their Starlight sensor and smart illumination technology out to 100ft at night, make a difference. The newer trail cameras offer this, and it certainly does deliver sharp, high-quality images and video, whatever image quality you opt for.



Two red deer spikers pause to drink while wading a watercourse.

Image quality options

Your choice of image quality depends on what you want and your SD card capacity. Most times I run photo only and deselect video, plus I choose image quality of 4–8MB, or less. That is when I am just interested in knowing what animal was there.

Occasionally, given repeated visits by a photogenic animal in a picturesque location, I will opt for maximum quality in both photo

and video mode. Most recent cameras now let you choose image quality up to 32MP and high-definition video of 1296P at 20fps. Combined with the image enhancement technology, cheap cameras can deliver some outstanding photos and videos.

Colour screen, intuitive menu and clear user guide

Some cameras have tiny control screens and cryptic text control information that can be frustrating. A large, colour screen with well-presented menu options can be a real asset, especially when combined with a comprehensive and well-written user guide.

Also, some models have a series of pre-programmed options for setting up the camera. That is convenient, perhaps, for folks new to trail cameras but soon becomes irksome once you know what you are doing and what you want. I like to be able to control all the variable aspects of the camera.

Field deployment tips

Orientation

In summer I try to locate my cameras looking to the north or the south. In winter I prefer mostly a southerly aspect. Why? The early morning and late afternoon sun will flare-out any photos and videos. And it is dawn and dusk when animals are mostly on the move.

The summer sun is angled overhead through the day, so N or S is fine. In winter, the sun swings well to the north and can still flare-out the camera in late morning and early afternoon.



A generic full-featured trail camera, this one badged Agitato, for around \$100.



The local alpha male.

Placement

Low placement gives a larger field of operation and images of animals look better from a low vantage point. However, if there are cattle in the area it is best to mount your cameras at head height. Cattle are inquisitive, much more so than they let on when you are there, and they will want to look closely at, sniff and lick your camera, if they can reach it.

If it is lower, cattle will want to rub against it to satisfy a hard-to-reach itch. Your camera will be dislodged and then trampled. To catch game on the move, it is obviously better to angle your camera along a game trail rather than at right angles (especially if you have 5 sec trigger response). You will get a lot more good footage.

Fixing in place

I do not use the straps that trail cameras come with. I find that often they are slippery and hard to pull up tight. Also, most often, the tree I am seeking to put the camera on is either too large or too small to use the strap. Additionally, straps really stand out in the bush and highlight your camera's location.

Mostly, I use self-tapping galvo screws and cord or thin galvo wire to mount my trail cameras. I have used cable-ties in the past but stopped doing that when I found that the glossy plastic ties can sometimes reflect strongly in sunlight. Wild dogs in particular are constantly spooked by such reflections.

Synchronise the date and time

I am constantly amazed at how many people do not bother to set the time and date. To me, it is useful to have all my trail cameras synchronised. For that I use my iPhone time and reset the time on cameras as required. The time keeping of trail cameras is prone to drift, so I check the time whenever I swap out SD cards.

Why synchronise the cameras? If synchronised, and you have a few of them spread out over a property, it is useful to know when photos/videos were taken

relative to the other cameras. That immediately tells you the direction the animals are moving and lets you reposition your cameras to better define that, or to set up a bushwhack.

Expect surprises

You go to swap trail camera cards and see that two stags have torn up the ground right in front of the camera. Clearly, they have tussled there for hours. You know your camera has delivered thousands of photos in this location, of passing rabbits, fleeting birds, falling leaves, butterflies and the like. You expect to harvest a treasure trove of outstanding deer images and video.

When you check, there are plenty of images on that card, day and night, but they just feature all those bunnies etc. There is not one, not even one, of those stags. On the other hand, your sneak in to swap cards on another camera. You examine the ground carefully as you approach. All the tracks are old, the same ones that you saw previously. There are not even any fresh bird or bunny tracks.

Disappointed, it is days before you check that SD card, expecting it to be mostly empty. When you do though, wow, there are some amazing wildlife images and videos. Get used to all that, it is part of the magic and fun of using trail cameras. ■



One of the culprits revisits the scene of the crime.

Milestone magnificence!



Ben Smith treats himself to a Beretta 486 Parallelo – 10th Anniversary Model shotgun

Be it a shotgun or rifle, for years I could never afford to buy a brand-new gun. I was always perusing the various used gun websites like ssaagunsales.com or the second-hand shelves of gun dealers when I was in the market for another gun.

My first shotgun was an old beater Franchi 12-gauge field gun, choked $\frac{3}{4}$ and full, which I used on everything from trap and skeet through to field shooting ducks, foxes and rabbits. When mandatory steel shot was brought in, I scrounged a set of

second-hand Franchi barrels choked $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ and got my local gunsmith to fit them. I was set for everything!

Fast forward to 2024. After many years of owning various guns in all gauges and calibres, making all the mistakes and learning from them, my 40th birthday was fast approaching. My wife and kids asked me what I wanted. Well, of course there are always a million things I want but reality and dreams are two different things.

I had been wanting another side-by-side shotgun for a long time. When I turned 18, I

got an old Greener side-by-side for shooting ducks. So, I figured, a new side-by-side shotgun would be the ideal treat for this milestone. It had to be of heirloom quality, that would outlast me.

As luck would have it Beretta Australia sent out an email that same day with eight of their Beretta 486 Parallelo 10th Anniversary shotguns in the country. I sent an online enquiry and Edward from Beretta Premium promptly contacted me. He explained the process of purchasing one, and all I had to do was pick one of



the eight guns from their website. Beretta would then send the chosen gun up to my local gunshop (Venture Outdoors) and they would take out the PTA for me.

Simple right? Well, not really. The hardest part for me was deciding on a traditional straight hand stock or the pistol grip style stock. I'd used a straight hand style stock before, and it came up nicely – done, straight it was then. Next there were four guns with the straight hand stock in varying styles of timber. I selected a gun that had a tight grain and almost tiger striped look to it.

I got back to Edward the next day and before I knew it the gun was being shipped from Melbourne to Brisbane. Staff from Venture Outdoors called me the next day to confirm a few crucial details for the PTA and then the waiting game began.

Fast forward a few weeks and I picked the gun up and was ready to give it the once over on the SSAA sporting clays range.

The action is a traditional Anson and Deeley boxlock with a round body style, featuring profuse deep scroll engraving. As this is Beretta's 10-year anniversary edition,

there is a pheasant engraved on the bottom of the receiver along with 1/486 – the total number made.

All models are single triggers, with an automatic safety catch. I appreciate the trigger break on this shotgun, being incredibly crisp and responsive – even on the second barrel.

The barrels come in two options of 28" or 30". I picked the 28" as I felt the balance would be better. The 30" barrels feel too 'slow' for me. It really comes down to personal preference.

Milestone magnificence!



As part of the limited edition run, only 486 of these were made.



Ben couldn't wait to test out his birthday 'present' with his son.

As previously mentioned, there are two stock options: the straight hand or pistol grip stock. The straight hand style stock comes with a thin English splinter style fore-end. The pistol grip comes with a beaver tail style fore-end. I will admit the splinter style fore-end initially took a bit of getting used to, but once I settled into my rhythm, I never noticed it again.

The 486 comes with a set of five removable chokes from skeet through to full. I generally just leave $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ chokes in my gun for all my shooting. With today's modern cartridges and chokes, the patterns are exceptional out to moderate shotgun ranges. Beretta spends a lot of time on research and development on their barrels and it shows.

These guns are all proof tested to be used with modern high performance steel shotgun loads. So, if you are in one of the

lucky states with a duck season or duck mitigation, this gun can handle those newer heavy steel loads.

Probably the last item to mention is the gun case, which is bright orange on the outside, meaning you'll never lose it. The orange cloth covered case goes well with the beige suede interior lining. The interior is partitioned with a storage area for chokes etc and the barrels and stock.

At the point of writing this I have only shot this gun at sporting clays a couple of times. Say 500+ clays. Within the first few shots, I felt the gun came up naturally. I was initially hesitant, after not using a side-by-side for several years, but after the first stand I was back smacking them in the centre and sending pieces of clay flying. I started my first few stands with skeet and $\frac{1}{4}$ chokes but later progressed to $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ chokes, which is where I will leave

them for now in this shotgun. I feel that these chokes are adequate for 90 per cent of field or sporting clays situations, especially with how good the patterns are with this Beretta gun.

One thing to note is that the stock is around 14.5" long with a timber butt plate, which is a bit short for me but I'm sure when chasing a few winter bunnies over the border I'll have extra layers on, so it won't be an issue. Generally, field guns have a shorter length of pull so they can be mounted quickly, without any fuss.

I am extremely happy with the quality of this gun, and I am sure it will last my lifetime and beyond. Priced at \$12,999, it was the ultimate 40th present to myself and worth every cent!

Keep an eye out for how it performs hunting in a future edition of *Australian Hunter* magazine. ■

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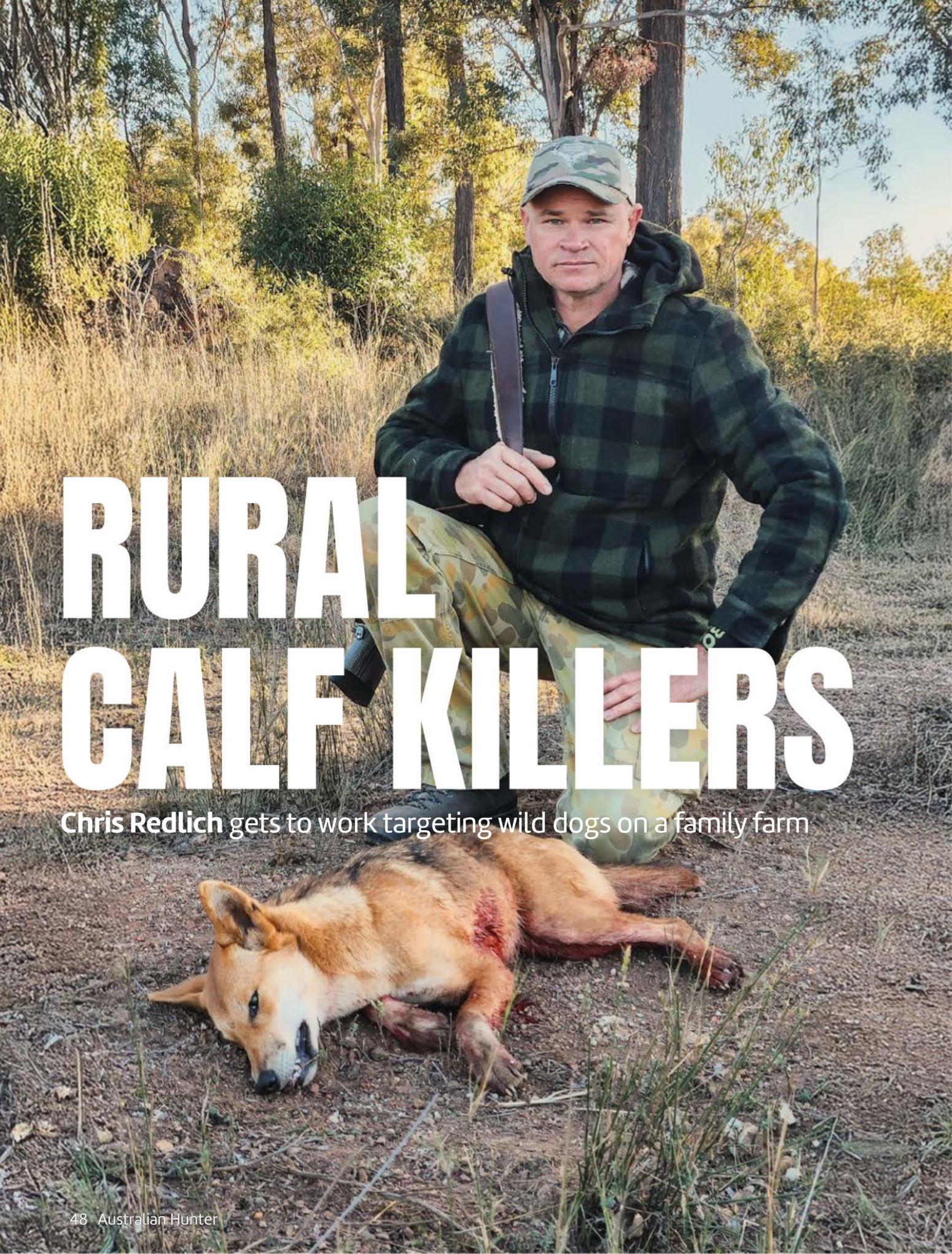
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A man wearing a camouflage cap and a dark green and black checkered jacket is kneeling in a field of tall grass and trees. He is holding a knife in his right hand. In front of him lies a dead wild dog, possibly a dingo, with a visible wound on its side. The background shows a line of trees under a clear sky.

RURAL CALF KILLERS

Chris Redlich gets to work targeting wild dogs on a family farm

While the argument rages on what defines a wild dog, their destructive behaviour can be attested by most graziers across the country. There's a reason rural authorities spend massive amounts of money on baiting programs and scalp bounties. While I'm not a fan of baiting, I can't help but sympathise with the landowners doing it, losing substantial portions of income thanks to wild dogs.

Hunting by shooting is a safer method to controlling their numbers, and one of my favourite pastimes. I've been sporadically hunting wild dogs on many properties for 20 years and find it not only to be challenging, but exciting and rewarding.

Opportunities arose to hunt wild dogs on my brother Charlie's property, a place that has seen its fair share of in-house control. However, through lack of management by adjoining forestry blocks, evidence such as footprints and fresh scat littered his vehicle tracks. After a good rain season following a prolonged drought, the cattle herd was at last putting on condition, with numerous young calves on the drop. The wild dogs posed a very real and unacceptable threat.

My son Carl's rugby league game at Kingaroy in South East Queensland saw us just a 'stone's throw' from Charlie's farm. His household made the short trip to support Carl's game but also extended the invitation to return to their place for a hunt the next day. "Come back to our place and make sure you bring your guns," were Charlie's words. I didn't need my arm to be twisted any further for an excuse to shoot wild dogs.

In recent times the wild dogs had become so brazen in their appearances that my sister-in-law Rachael managed to film and photograph a wild dog bitch from the kitchen window, licking her lips at the chook pen gate. This was not an isolated incident as my niece had been eerily shadowed by wild dogs while walking her own pet dogs and horses. Charlie had told my young niece and nephew never to run from a wild dog as that encourages a pursuit. Heeding good advice, they have managed to reach the safety of the house without being attacked.

It was the end of May and as the dawning of winter approached, so too the



Fresh footprints on the tracks show evidence of unwanted wild dog activity.



The brazen wild dog, just out the kitchen window, stalking the chook pen dangerously close to the kids' play area.

Rural calf killers

early morning frosts. All night the wild dogs gave unsettling howls from around the property. Laying in my swag, I found it hard to settle. When Sam arrived, I'd momentarily slipped into the realms of dream land prior to the alarm blaring but was up in a flash and ready for hunting before the kettle was boiled. Despite the bumps and bruises from Saturday's game, a morning's hunt was the best remedy for Carl. His enthusiasm for an early morning rise was matched only by my nephew Tom, who'd slept all night in his camo clothing and was ready to step off as soon as we'd finished our coffees.

Leaving the house under the cover of darkness was exciting as the wild dog howls lured us to their domain. By the time we'd reached a vantage point in the trees, our now visible breath from the sub-zero air indicated not only 'first light' but wind direction. While we sat down to take in the surroundings, the sun rose behind us to illuminate the theatre of paddock with its bush background. This provided a perfect spot to watch, listen and shoot. Eagerly anticipating some action, Charlie's dog howls were met with wild replies. It was then we realised that dogs were replying from all around, which had us pivoting in an unsettled state of awareness.

The performance continued for some time until a flash of orange from the boundary had our attention. In and out the wild dog weaved through the trees toward an area of the paddock in full view. Our howls kept the dog interested but it wasn't completely convinced we were there for handshakes and a bowl of dog biscuits. While still visible, it kept a safe position from us shooting.

Thinking at the time it was the dumbest idea I've ever heard; Charlie encouraged me to walk across the paddock and pretend like I hadn't noticed the dog and assume position in the trees for a clearer shot. Immediately feeling completely exposed as I left cover, the dog saw me and understandably ran to the trees. Well, if anything at least, the remaining hunting party were entertained at my expense!

Rifle at the ready, I remained steadfast behind the trees looking back to where the wild dog was last seen, while Charlie

continued howling from a distance. To my surprise the wild dog reappeared from the bush and moved back to the spot he'd fled earlier. Tree by tree, I swiftly but quietly closed the gap to a safe range of 80m.

The dog took up view in the scope and the Marlin .45-70 rifle barked. Dead in an instant thanks to a single 300gr bullet, the sound of cheers by the boys soon followed, who were watching through their binos. They'd just witnessed me shoot my first wild dog in a couple of years and it eliminated another rural calf killer from the farm.

Amid the celebrations, I expressed initial displeasure of Charlie's unconventional hunting advice, but it was hard to argue success with a wild dog at our feet. Being ones not to waste the opportunity for extra cash, we removed the scalp and headed home for breakfast.

Still riding the high of enthusiasm from the morning's hunt, our afternoon was spent chasing large wild pigs that briefly appeared by a dam bank. They lured us into thick scrub but unfortunately remained concealed.



Charlie shot this consolation boar with a Marlin lever rifle.



Wild dog number two thanks to Charlie's sharp shooting.

Success, however, would follow the next day when Charlie and the Marlin lever rifle shot a large wild boar in the paddock and a strong male dog roaming dangerously close to the herd. Although, exciting as it was at the time that we'd shot two dogs in two days, it remained a concern they were reappearing so quickly. An invitation to return soon was promptly accepted and as a family, we made a trip back to the property two weeks later.

As we rolled out a carbon copy start to our previous hunt, two wild dogs flirted with exposure along the boundary fence once more. Unable to get a clear fire lane due to undulation and distance, we stayed patient as I told Carl to prepare for a possible shot. Days earlier we'd test fired groups out to 200m and both my .22 PPC and 6.5 Creedmoor rifles were spot on, adding confidence to the situation. Carl sat and settled the .22 PPC against a tree and kept watch. Minutes later, a big male dog emerged through grass, propped and peered in our direction. Happy he hadn't seen us, yet obviously swooned by Charlie's howls, we remained patient. Advancing to 230m, a momentary distraction presented him broadside and Carl instinctively fired. The dog sprang to the air as we heard the thud, and down he went a few metres away, briefly from view in the thick grass.

I witnessed the events through my binoculars and saw the impact of the 50gr Ballistic Tip pierce the dog's shoulder. I was proud of Carl and his calmness under pressure, congratulating him on a fine one-shot kill. The visible signs and smell of blood as we approached the downed dog confirmed a quick heart shot and being Carl's very first wild dog, he naturally expressed his joy.

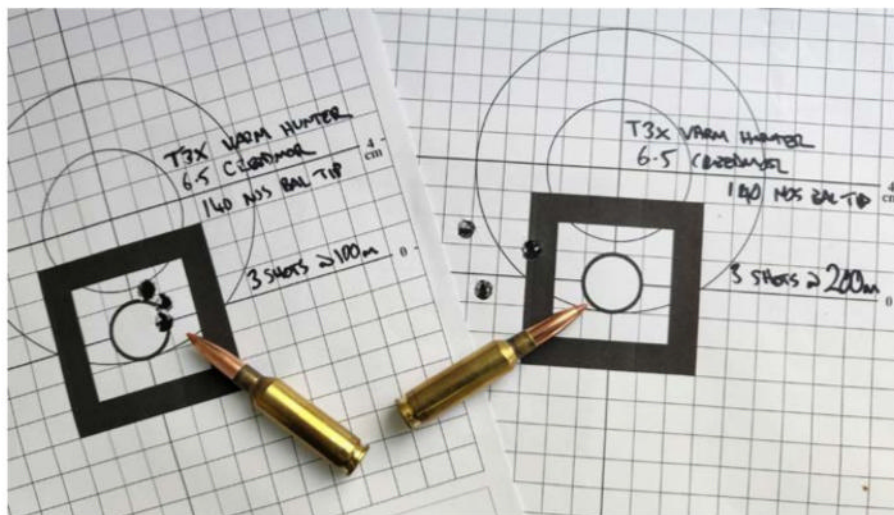
The following morning it was my turn for a shot but after an hour and a half we decided to call it quits. We'd shouldered our backpacks when suddenly, a dog came into view. Now slightly exposed, we froze as not to spook the cunning killer.

Lowering ourselves to the ground, I carefully removed my pack and used it for a rest. It wasn't long before I took a sight picture and fired at the dog as he propped 240m away. As expected, he dropped

and died on the spot thanks to the 140gr Ballistic Tip load from my 6.5 Creedmoor.

Over the two weekends our cash balance for scalp bounties was starting to add up and although not our reason for hunting wild dogs, it certainly helps cover the cost of fuel. I'm happy to report the four wild dogs taken have had a significant

impact on wild dog activity, rewarding our efforts for a noticeable reduction in attacks on the young herd. The excitement I've had hunting these predators over the years is something I can now share with my son, another form of hunting and a legacy he has expressed a keen interest to follow. ■



The 6.5 Creedmoor sighted accurately at 100m and 200m, and was ready for hunting.



Carl's first wild dog, the third taken in two weeks.

Riflescope logic



Neale Ellis well knows the value of low-powered scopes and red dot systems on hunting rifles.

This Crossfire 2-7x32 has proven to be a good choice on Dick's .22 Rimfire Remington S/A rifle.



Dick Eussen points to the basics for hunting success

Experienced hunters well know that having a riflescope that delivers an instant sharp image and fast target acquisition is the difference between a hit and a miss on a moving target. When a snapshot is offered, the scope should be able to centre the target fast enough that there is little need to align the reticle. You just place it and lead the target to where you want the bullet to hit, providing you follow through and don't slow your swing down.

This is simple if the target is in the same plane as the centre of the reticle and your eyes don't have to adjust to focusing and wasting time trying to centre it. Many hunters waste effort following a moving boar trying to centre on it, and when they do catch up, abruptly stop the follow-through sweep, jerk the trigger and miss.

When you raise your rifle, the scope should have an instant bright and sharp picture of the target. If not, you lose valuable time picking it up, something which is almost a guarantee if your variable scope is set to high magnification, for instance 6x and over.

This can be avoided by using a low-powered 1-5x model scope, which has plenty of magnification for hunting. There's more than enough light than the human eye can use, as 6x permits a 7mm exit pupil – all that the eye can handle, even in total darkness and with a 40mm objective.

When the scope is set at 1x for close range scrub shooting it means that when you lock onto the target, you don't waste time aiming at it because you can shoot with both eyes open. This is similar to using a red/green dot sight. To put this into perspective, 1x magnification at 100m is the accepted standard but if you look at that setting at 600m, you understand why larger magnification is better for long-range shooting.

Close-up hunting is all about field of view (FOV). The wider the picture the quicker you see the prey, meaning rapid target acquisition. Many modern hunting rifles are fitted with large and heavy variable scopes better suited to target rifles. The magnification is too high for fast action on moving targets and they also make the outfit too unwieldy.

FOV is rated in feet at 100m, while in binoculars and spotting scopes the FOV is stated at 1000m. Ocular lens diameter affects FOV, though it's not noticeable. Most scopes are designed to be mounted for 7-10cm of eye relief, important in high-power rifles to prevent eyebrow and nose damage from recoil. Scopes designed for carbine barrels and handguns have a smaller FOV.

To put that into perspective, at 1x power, the scope is like what you see with the naked eye, which can see and identify objects faster because it's not altered. The FOV of low-powered scopes enables quick target acquisition and a rapid shot because it's akin to a natural response, with no time wasted trying to find the target. With a high-powered scope, the FOV is severely restricted.

By keeping a low-powered hunting scope set at, for instance, 2.5x, you have an immediate clear picture that when used with uncluttered cross-hairs, or similar, gives an instant sight picture without annoying and disturbing edge curvature.

I recently shot five pigs, all moving swiftly through open country, while old

Riflescope logic

mate was vainly trying to find them in his variable scope that he accidentally had set on 12x. If you want a generous FOV, fit scopes no larger than 5x power on a hunting rifle for rapid target acquisition. I have a 4–12x Leupold on my .308W Sako rifle, but rarely feel the need to power it above the 4–6x setting – about the maximum power needed for most hunting.

Not that magnification is bad, far from it, but I tend to have this scope turned to the lowest setting unless I want to increase the target magnification. Until then I keep it on 4x for tight cover and 6x for open woodlands and hills.

Low-powered scopes have less eye relief, meaning that you can mount it a little forward on heavy recoiling rifles and avoid the real danger of a 'Weatherby eyebrow', not something you want to happen on a hunt, especially if you are a bleeder.

The lower the scope power, the faster the sight picture, and more importantly, a moving target is picked up and locked onto. I have seen it often, and it has happened to me on occasions, when the scope power was too high and finding a fast-moving target on that setting was more luck than skill.

Not long back, I noted a wild dog some 300m away loping along at a steady pace.

I cranked the Leupold scope to 12x on the .308W Sako rifle and picked him up. The first shot hit the dirt behind him because I did not lead enough. Surprisingly, he turned around to check the disturbance, which gave me the chance to put the calf killer down for the count.

A couple of hours later, old mate and I surprised a mob of pigs under a shady place in thick scrub. They scattered and he shot three while I failed to find one in the scope, because you guessed it, I had forgotten to turn the power back to 4x. It happens and again proves that wider is better for stalking. I would not be the first to have forgotten to turn the dial down and missed close-up running targets because the FOV was too narrow for a snapshot.

A wide FOV is much faster with low magnification than with high magnification, while the picture is also brighter. However, all good brand scopes nowadays sport full multi-coated lenses that are coated inside and out with rare earth elements for increased light transmission across the total range of wavelengths. For instance, uncoated lenses may lose over 4 per cent light reflection and refraction, which does not sound much until you multiply it with other air-glass voids within the tube. This is a reason to avoid cheap copies of the real thing.

The exit pupil is also important for brightness as only a beam of light, about 4mm, reaches your eye. The lower the magnification, the brighter the image, which is not to be confused with the increased size of an object.

A sharp sight picture starts with a good quality scope that has highly polished glass, something that is missing in poor quality scopes. This is best judged by brand and price. Many modern target, and some hunting, scopes have external focus parallax adjustments and more, but most hunting scopes are set on about 100–150m.

Earlier high-range models were fitted with indexed objective bells, but focus is now manually done with a dial knob on the turret with crisp, backlash-free quarter-minute clicks that won't budge from heavy recoil. More hunting scopes are being fitted with improved devices and we may see the day when loosening the lock-ring and using the thin eyepiece threads to bring the cross-hairs into focus will give way to turret adjustments. I generally point the scope into a clear blue sky and turn the eyepiece until the cross-hairs stand out in sharp relief. It works for me, but many new scopes have a fast-focus or helical eyepiece fitted and no lock-ring, although few hunters bother with it in the field, leaving it whatever it's set on.

Another factor is that the once popular 1" (25.4mm) tube has been largely replaced by 30mm tubes or larger. These offer an increase in elevation adjustment, as extra adjustment parts can be fitted inside it, an asset for long-range shooting.

However, they are not needed for short-range shooting. But for purpose, high-powered long-range scopes intended for target shooting, the 30mm tube's extra internal adjustments make a difference.

For instance, the Leupold Mark 5HD 3.6–18x44mm scope has a 35mm tube with several features, including reticle travel of 35 mils elevation and 17 mils of windage. It's an amazing scope for long-range shooting, with precise adjustments and range dialling possible from the turrets, but it's unsuitable for hunting, a job far better done with a 1–4x scope.

A common belief is that a larger tube allows extra light in and that they have a



Dick prefers low-powered scopes on his hunting rifles, like the Leupold 1x5 VX-R Scout on a custom .35 Whelan.



The turret adjustments on low-powered scopes are positive, simple and easy to follow.

somewhat wider FOV, but that is false as the objective size and the eyepiece do not change, both which determine the light-gathering ability of the scope.

Many experienced hunters have a steadfast belief that 4x is all the power required for a hunting scope, and indeed years back most scopes sold were in that power range. Variable scopes were suspect as being too fragile for harsh field conditions, but that is now in the past and both variable and fixed-power scopes from top makers are totally reliable.

Thus, it matters little what tube size you pick, but if you hunt in harsh conditions you may want to check out the 30mm tube as they are supposedly more robust than

1" tubes. It's a matter of preference. For instance, the 30mm tube is better suited to a centrefire hunting rifle than a .22 rimfire, which is fine with a 1" tube.

And don't forget that you require different sized scope mounts for different sized tubes. The objective lens rules what size and how low you can mount the scope on the rifle, the lower the mount, the better and faster sight acquisition in the field.

Several of my hunting rifles are fitted with low 1–4.5x power scopes, including my .22 rimfires used for bunny hunting. I hunt in environments ranging from rainforest, scrub, farmlands, monsoon woodlands and open plains, using rifles that are purpose selected for the job. For instance, the

.308W Sako is fitted with a 4–12x Leupold scope and can be adjusted for short and long-distance game, even though 4x is on the upper limit for close-up hunting. My .270 Weatherby Magnum is fitted with the same model scope and it's my rifle of choice for plains game pigs and deer, both having been taken beyond 500m. This is not my favourite form of hunting, but on the plains and in open forest it may mean missing out if the shot is not taken, though such shots are rare.

Another 4–12x Leupold scope is on my .223 Magnum Sako rifle because when hunting on inland plains and tropical regions, lifting mirage is a real problem that blurs images, especially when enlarged too much. Generally, 12x is about the upper limit for most conditions on hot days, even for short distances.

To sum things up, using a low-powered scope means that you have an instant FOV and a target that is picked up into the centre of the reticle faster than is possible with higher scope magnification. Also, low-powered scopes are not cluttered with unwanted lines, dots and dashes that, while being an advantage in long-range shooting, have no place in the hunting field. What one does not need when in a hurry is a cluttered and confusing FOV, thus sticking to the plain old simple 'cross' is preferred.

Still, many hunters lean toward high magnification just in case they require more power for a long-distance shot. However, even at a low setting, few are practical for a quick offhand shot. While a valid argument, whether the rifle is also suitable is another topic.

You also need to ensure that the optical glass is free of dust, especially when the scope is not fitted with a dust guard. Dust, scratches and blotches reduce brightness and regular cleaning with a proper lens cleaner is recommended. I use camera lens cleaners but reading glass cleaners are fine.

There you have it, use low-powered scopes on your hunting rifles, especially when short distance shooting is involved. Big, sharp target scopes also increase the overall weight of your rifles, the last thing you need when walking and hiking in rough or mountain country on a hot day. ■



Hunting rifles are best served with low-powered scopes like this 1.25x4 Leupold 'European 30' mounted on a Remington 7600 .308 slide-action rifle.

GOING BUSH WITH THE O.Gs

Symmetry between two of the best in the business,
Don Caswell and Bushman

I persevered with ice boxes for decades. That included a couple of decades living, camping, fishing and hunting in the Northern Territory and Papua New Guinea. They worked fine but did need good planning and management with the ice supply. In recent years, my buddies all moved to car fridges, and I could appreciate the convenience of that. It was time for a change. Most of its use would be for the results of my hunting. But there would be day trips, camping trips and just doing the shopping. It would also be useful at home, as a second refrigerator, holding desserts or beverages for occasional functions. The fridge would be used at least a few times per week. I did a lot of research, both online and asking folks' opinions on their car fridges. My search narrowed down to a Bushman car fridge. Apart from the technicalities, they have a wealth of highly complimentary reviews from happy owners.



For extended periods out bush: a deep cycle battery, solar charging and inverter.

Bushman Australia provided *Australian Hunter* the ideal set-up in the 'Original Bushman SC35-52' car fridge. It is expandable from 35L capacity to 52L with the addition of an extender collar and domed lid, and conveniently runs from both 240V

and 12V power systems. This Original Bushman has been in production for more than 20 years, won many design awards along the way and amassed a small army of devotees. The Original Bushman SC35-52 carries a 5-year warranty too.

To run a car fridge effectively, especially out bush for days at a time, requires some auto-electrical work on a 4WD. The sparkie wired my car with a heavy-duty, deep-cycle, second battery and set that up to charge from the car when running. A solar charging connection was also made, for those periods of days when the vehicle is not in use. While he was at it, an inverter was also installed to enable GPO 240V devices to be used, like my vacuum sealer for bagging game meat in the field.



Original Bushman car fridge with the 52L collar fitted.

The fridge runs a German designed Nidec Danfoss BD35 compressor. The cabinet is made of steel and there are heavy-duty tie-down points at each corner (that should be used). A transit cover of tough, insulating material was also fitted. That provides additional insulation and protection from knocks and scratches. The control panel is simple and intuitive. On the inside of the lid the table of temperature settings to suit different food requirements is most handy. With its 52L volume and ability to run as a fridge, fridge-freezer or freezer the Original Bushman means we can easily be off-grid for a week, or more, and enjoy our choices of food and beverage. It also means I can conveniently bring home a load of prime game meat.

For me, it has made my meat harvesting much easier. I can place the meat in the car fridge without the need to scurry home and get it in the home fridge. That gives me useful hours, or even days, to enjoy other aspects of the great outdoors. My processing of game meat, be it bunnies or venison,

has evolved to the point where I now do all my processing in the field and just bring home vacuum-sealed bags of meat ready for consumption. The car fridge is the key element that enables that process.

The essentials for an extended camping set-up consist of the following:

- Bushman Original 35-52L fridge/freezer
- Solar panels to charge a 120Ah deep-cycle battery
- Auto-electrical installation for a 120Ah battery, inverter and solar charging.

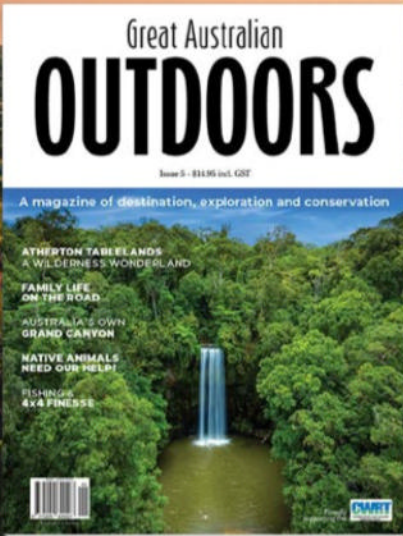
The Bushman car fridge has now been in the vehicle for over a year. Operation has been flawless and glitch free. It has endured being bounced about on the roughest dirt tracks and cross-country venison retrievals. After only a short time with the Bushman we wondered how we had done without a car fridge-freezer for so long. Like so many other happy users, we totally endorse it. Bushman car fridges are available from major retailers. Retail pricing for the Original Bushman 35-52L, with all the trimmings, is \$1495.

Visit bushman.com.au ■



A haul of hares ready to go into the Bushman.



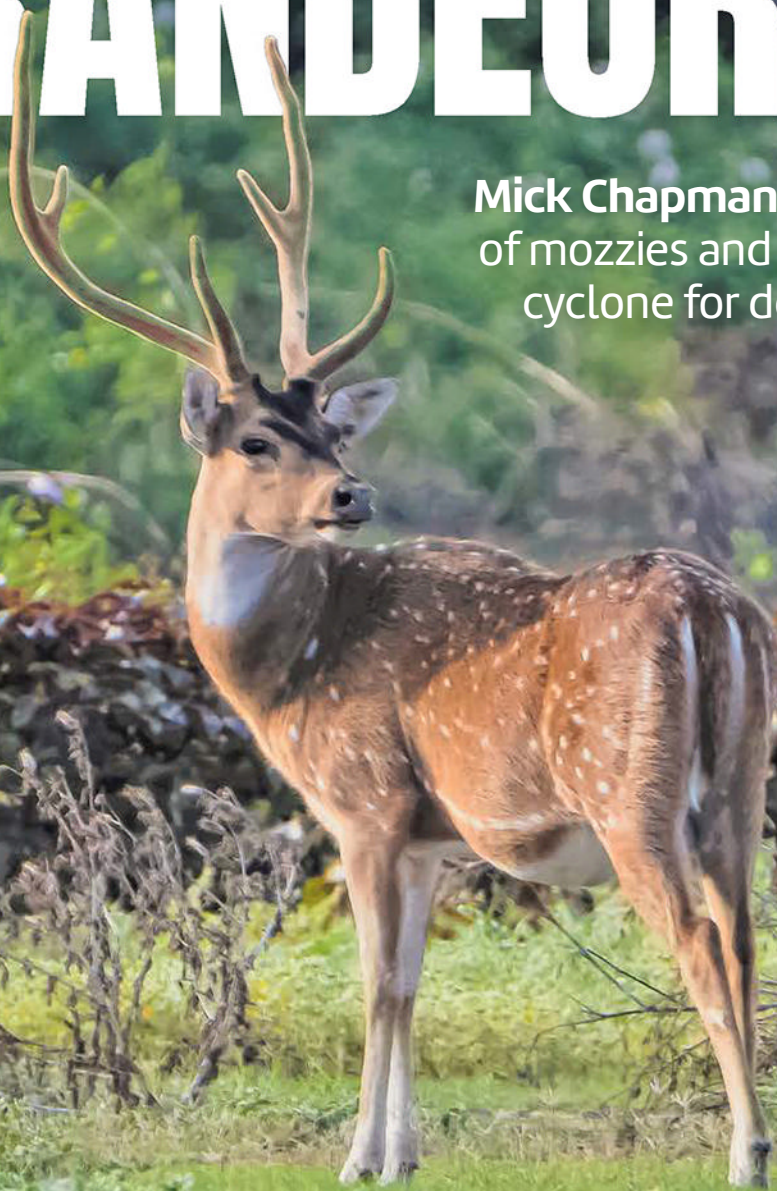


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CHITAL GRANDEUR

Mick Chapman faces millions of mozzies and an impending cyclone for deer delights



One of many beautiful young stags in velvet. With monarchs like this sitting in the wings waiting to be dominant breeders, the herd is in good stead.

My grandson Xavier and I had just finished building a bridge over the creek, below the house, enabling access to my back paddock. The humidity had been horrendous, when finally, the skies opened up and some much-needed rain tumbled down upon a thirsty landscape. My phone rang, it was my mate, Matt.

Matt has a guiding business, and a client, Jake, was booked to hunt chital deer trophies during the rut in North Queensland. He would be leaving the day after the school holidays finished and asked if I was interested in lending a hand as camp assistant etc. Of course I was!

We were aware of a cyclone forming off the coast but didn't let it deter us. We would keep an eye on developments and if need be, shorten the trip accordingly.

At 2am the following morning we were in my ute heading north for a straight-through drive, arriving some 12 hours later. Our home for the hunt was individual air-conditioned bedrooms with a huge open space, under cover, as the communal eating and lounge area.

Thank God for modern technology, with solar electricity, gas stoves and hot and cold water showers, we had a great venue. As we unloaded, the first thing to draw one's attention was the mozzies, they were in plague proportions, buzzing, biting and just generally annoying.

Jake is a boilermaker by trade and a keen hunter. He had never hunted chital but had some experience hunting reds. He ended up showing a huge amount of patience when it came to choosing his trophy.

The first evening saw us on a massive flood plain with a large billabong stretching about three quarters of the length of it. There were literally hundreds of deer feeding in front of us, what a dilemma that can create for the hunter.

The disturbance to the herd created by the rutting stags calling, running from one of the hundreds of does to another, or chasing opposition stags off, was in a constant state of movement. Stags were locked in combat for dominance while others were in various stages of antler growth. We faced literally hundreds of sets of eyes constantly watching for danger.



A wonderful stag taken by Mick without regret on the first day of the hunt.

Each potential trophy animal required time to assess. By this I mean check for maturity, length and antler thickness, plus colour of cape to be sure it was into full colour phase. All the while the constant buzzing and stinging bites of mozzies disrupted our concentration levels while glassing each mob.

Some stags looked good, evoking the question of whether to take them or wait? As if by king's decree, another stag would then parade before us, appearing to have better credentials. Our assessments would begin again, only to be thwarted by yet another stag supporting great head gear.

Being the first night, there was no rush to decide. Jake was showing caution as to whether he should shoot or not, as he should. Matt was about to back out when I called his attention to a stag I thought was worth more than a second glance. Having my Nikon P1000 camera with me I took several distant photos of the stag. Light was poor and the zoom large, but I managed a couple of photos with enough detail to raise some interest. I showed them to Matt and Jake.

After looking at the photos I was more than convinced this was no ordinary stag. His inners were impressive, and he showed weight in the main beams with good length. Matt wasn't so convinced, but offered Jake the first shot, though he declined. Too good for me to pass on, I

hadn't brought my rifle so borrowed Jake's .308 Win. About 400m from the deer we began a slow stalk, closing the gap to about 280m.

Using a delicate rise in the ground as a rest, setting the cross-hairs squarely on the stag's shoulder, I squeezed the trigger. The stag collapsed where it stood. As we walked to where the stag lay, Matt commented something about ground shrinkage, making me somewhat nervous on our approach.

No need for apprehension. As I grabbed the antlers for the first time, I knew instantly I had made the correct decision. In my hand was a beautiful specimen of a chital stag – heavy, long, even, neck swollen from being in the rut with the most magnificent cape. His body size, in comparison to the other deer we were looking at, made him a giant among his peers. During the following few days we noticed body sizes varied, which often made calling the antler size inherently difficult.

I couldn't have been happier. I have often heard it said to never pass up a deer on the first day that you would willingly shoot on the last day. Over the next week, none of the stags we saw flicked my switch like this stag.

The following day saw us up at daybreak, walking to a known early morning haunt for deer. We were not disappointed; the deer were like fleas on a dog's back. As the light brightened, we could see many potential

Chital grandeur

trophies in front of us, though three stags were standouts. One was clearly longer than all the others, another had huge tops while the third was just a beautiful mature stag.

The deer were 300m from us, with no hope of closing the gap due to the number of eyes and ears that could bring us undone at any moment. Try as he may, Jake just didn't feel comfortable taking the shot. Too good an opportunity to let go, this time Matt decided to have a crack.

Using my Manfrotto camera tripod as his rest, he let the largest stag have it, dropping it like a sack of potatoes in the middle of the open plain in front of us. In an instant the plains cleared of deer. Between us and the stag was a large waterhole that may have held a few crocodiles, so we decided to walk back to the vehicle and drive to the stag.

An hour later we drove over the plain to where the deer was last seen. Nothing! The deer had disappeared. We were totally flummoxed, we had watched the deer for approximately 10 minutes after the shot, all of us convinced the stag had met his Waterloo. We searched for blood, Matt went back to where he shot from, then directed us to where the deer had dropped. We gridded the area, searching for a wet spot or a droplet of blood or any further clues, but nothing. The rest of the day was spent searching.

The heat was oppressive, but we continued our search. We had no blood, no leads at all, not even distinguishable footprints. The following day Matt and Jake went hunting while I searched for signs, but still nothing. On the flipside, Jake managed to take a beautiful deer on his hunt.

Matt never retrieved that big deer but did eventually take a great stag after a testing stalk. The stag with great tops was out in front of us, some 500m away, preoccupied with his harem. The wind was howling as we had closed the gap to 300m with barely a skerrick of cover. Matt attempted a shot off the tripod but was buffeted too strongly by the wind. Our only chance was to close the gap more.

Using a slight fold in the ground, we hunched over and moved forward, aware of our vulnerability. Keeping our body and arm movements to a minimum, we slowly approached our prey.

Nearly 10 minutes later we were 50m closer when suddenly another unnoticed stag came along rounding up does. This was too much for our targeted stag, they were his does the fella was taking. Full of ire and intent he bolted toward the thieving marauder.

As the defender approached, our thief decided discretion was the better part of valour and scarpered off with his tail between his legs. Skidding to a halt, our targeted stag glared as his adversary disappeared. This action had brought our targeted stag within 100m. Matt, quickly into position on the tripod, waited for the stag to turn broadside, squeezing the shot off. Not knowing what hit him, the deer dropped.

When we approached the deer, his tops were a standout. What a magnificent deer Matt had taken. Matt, convinced he had taken his best chital stag, was mesmerized. The weather was changing, the tropical low had been declared a cyclone and once again discretion overrode valour, we packed up and headed home.

*The obvious conclusion with the missing deer is Matt's shot was high, hitting the deer in the spinous processes above the spine, knocking him out on the spot before he recovered. A lesson for us all on shot placement. *The Perfect Shot* by Kevin Robertson provides excellent insight on the matter. ■



A personal best chital stag for Matt.



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Bolognese baked venison

Don Caswell minces leftover offcuts for primo meatballs

This meatball recipe is a simple, tasty meal, good for home or when out camping. When I process a deer, I separate out the major steak muscles, like the rib fillets and rump. These I vacuum bag for two weeks ageing before eating or freezing for later. In squaring up these large muscles into neat, uniform blocks I keep the trimmed offcuts for mincing. It goes without saying that this is prime mince. There is a myriad of ways to cook such top-grade mince, and meatballs is a favourite.

Here are the basics for whipping up these venison meatballs in Bolognese sauce. The breadcrumbs and egg will deliver a softer-textured meatball. If you prefer your meatballs to be more dense and solid, then omit the breadcrumbs and egg. As always, there are many additional optional ingredients you can include, with a couple of favourites suggested. Don't be frightened to experiment.

Ingredients

- 500g venison, minced
- 1 medium brown onion, diced
- 1 medium carrot, grated
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- mixed dried herbs, a pinch
- 1/3 cup panko breadcrumbs
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 bottle of Bolognese sauce

- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 tablespoon black olives, diced (optional to taste)
- 1 tablespoon spicy chutney (optional to taste).

Method

1. Place all ingredients (except Bolognese sauce) in a large basin.
2. Blend and mix well with hands.
3. Form into meatballs.
4. Place meatballs in a large baking pan.

5. Pour Bolognese sauce over patties.
6. Bake in oven for 45 minutes at 180C (check at 30 minutes).

*Alternately, for campers, fry meatballs in a large pan and add the heated sauce before serving.

Dish up with fresh garden vegetables of your choice. Pasta is a tasty alternative. Serves 2-4, depending on the amount of veggies or pasta included. ■



Fresh veggies are great with the meatballs.

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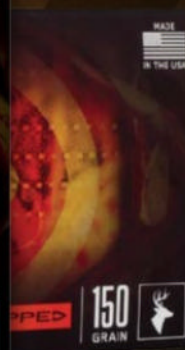
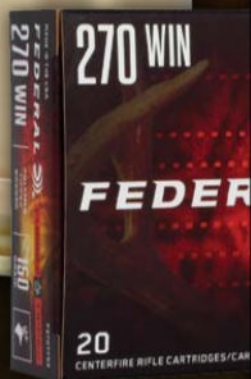
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AVAILABLE IN A RANGE OF CALIBRES



Foxing day





Adrian Kenney proves his point with a .17HMR and the right fundamentals for foxes

Your gun safe may hold one gun or several, but for most keen hunters there is always one or two that stand out compared to the others. One or two that when you reach for them, good things are more likely to happen. You've used them so much for a particular style of hunting that you've become confident in them, more than the others, that tend to feel foreign to you. Your old favourite. It just feels like it's a part of you. For me, one of those guns is the CZ .17HMR for fox whistling.

However, this doesn't seem to be the case for many, who find the .17HMR unsuitable for fox shooting. Unsuitable because they haven't had the results from the .17HMR that they expected. I've heard this several times. An old friend of mine put it best. "When a fox is facing you, the chest can be divided into thirds and two of those thirds are shoulders, with the remainder being the central core of the chest."

In my .17 HMR I'm only using 17gr hollow-points and on occasions 20gr. That's a small projectile. If you limit your fox shooting to mostly within 50yds, with the odd shot out to 80yds, there's few problems... if you can shoot accurately with your rifle. The other obvious choice is to take only head shots, which are quiet emphatic, but I personally prefer the stillness and predictability of the chest compared to the likelihood of erratic head movement.

There is however one other thing I've found with my .17 HMR regarding killing power on foxes, and that is to use hollow-point projectiles. I've tried other options, with okay results, but hollow-points have proved the best time and time again. I used a 5-shot magazine for many years but bought a 10-shot magazine more recently as it just makes sense to spend less time reloading a magazine when there could be a fox about.

A .17HMR and predator caller make a good combination for foxes.



Knowing the right angle to reach the vital area is especially important when using a light projectile.

Fox season sees me sitting out in the hills during summer to watch foxes on the run. February means padded tracks in the sand and the heavy odour of fox that is infused with the scent of the land. I'm often counting down the days.

A couple of properties on a morning outing provided four foxes before lunch-time and I thought I was in for a good day. The only downside being the need to drag the rather heavy foxes all the way back to the vehicle parked up on the hill, along with my hunting gear.

One of the morning foxes had been spotted on the side of a gully, giving me time to set up to call him in. As soon as I blew the whistle, he lifted his head and bolted down the hill toward me. Settling in behind the rifle I followed his fast and weaving path down the hill between patches of blackberry and briar.

I tried squeaking with my lips and then reverted to louder noises, but he wasn't stopping or slowing for anyone. If I didn't shoot soon, he'd be a blur in the riflescope and bolting away into the distance. So, I kept the cross-hairs steady on the core of his bounding form and fired.

Thwack! He crumpled at the shot and slid on his back a metre or two down the gully with his white and grey belly hair upward and legs flaying gently in the air. Man, I was glad I didn't stuff that up! Then, opening the bolt, ejecting the tiny brass case, a wisp of gun smoke rose upward into the air like a genie released from a bottle. I love that smell!

Onward to the next few properties I went with high hopes. I called from stand to stand and property to property and to my amazement didn't see a fox. I couldn't believe it! Arriving at another

location with a rather deflated spirit I set up in the best place I could, with an imperfect crosswind but I would be calling out into a good stand of cumbungi reeds. My predator call had barely started to squawk down into that tangle of reeds and swamp before raising the ears and heads of foxes, as two came tearing out of the cumbungi reeds.

The first fox appeared over the bank and began to slowly wander along sniffing the ground. She paused when confronted with an interesting scent and crumpled soon after as the rifle cracked, and bullet thwacked. Quickly reloading, I searched for the second fox and was greeted by nothing but the greens and browns of the countryside.

Then, to my amazement, the other fox appeared out of the gully to cautiously follow the scent trail left by that of the first. It propped to raise its head, peering up with a questioning gaze at the first fox laying still on the ground. Another quick crack and thwack and two were down. Not expecting anything else and rather surprised by the behaviour of the last fox, I casually reloaded the rifle and put the predator caller back to work with low expectations. Then, another one, just like the others – thwack! Three foxes in 15 minutes and I was loving life.

Of course, the suicidal fox supply had expired, and this property needed to be retired for the day. I managed another two from other places in a rather common and predictable fox whistling manner and headed to the final property with nine foxes in the back.

The late afternoon sun was painting the land with its orangey tinge as I set my shooting sticks up on a raised mound of dirt overlooking an expanse of open grassy paddocks. It stretched down past a dam and into a deep gully with plenty of cover for foxes to hide. Unfortunately, it was about 500m from my position so I would need the volume of the predator call to reach into the distance.

I had that predator caller screeching its lungs out in tortured desperation. I called and paused, called and paused... and just about rang the neck of that predator caller but nothing came. Nothing! That was my



A few fox whistle calls and the foxes were brought into close range for solid chest shots with the .17HMR.

last hope, my last chance and it was gone. Oh well, I had done my best.

As the predator caller was being placed back into my daypack with disappointment and the rifle unloaded, I heard a sound, a sound that meant trouble but to me filled my soul with hope. From way down the hill below where the dam pooled in the open paddock came the concerned calls of wood ducks. The sound they make when a predator is near, and that he was.

Out in the open paddock stood the form of a fox frozen with caution. He was still about 300yds out, giving me the time to reload and unpack to get ready. But boy, was he cautious. I've called from this position and shot foxes coming from there before and he seemed educated.

With the predator caller again singing a tempting tune, he continued on causing the wood ducks to flutter and run into a tight group as the form of a fox trotted

and paused, trotted and paused... his way onward toward me. Then, he sat down and wouldn't move. It was getting late, the light less, and he wouldn't budge.

I had to try something else. So now that he was about 150yds out into the neighbouring property I reached for the only other caller I had. The humble button whistle, and I squealed my best.

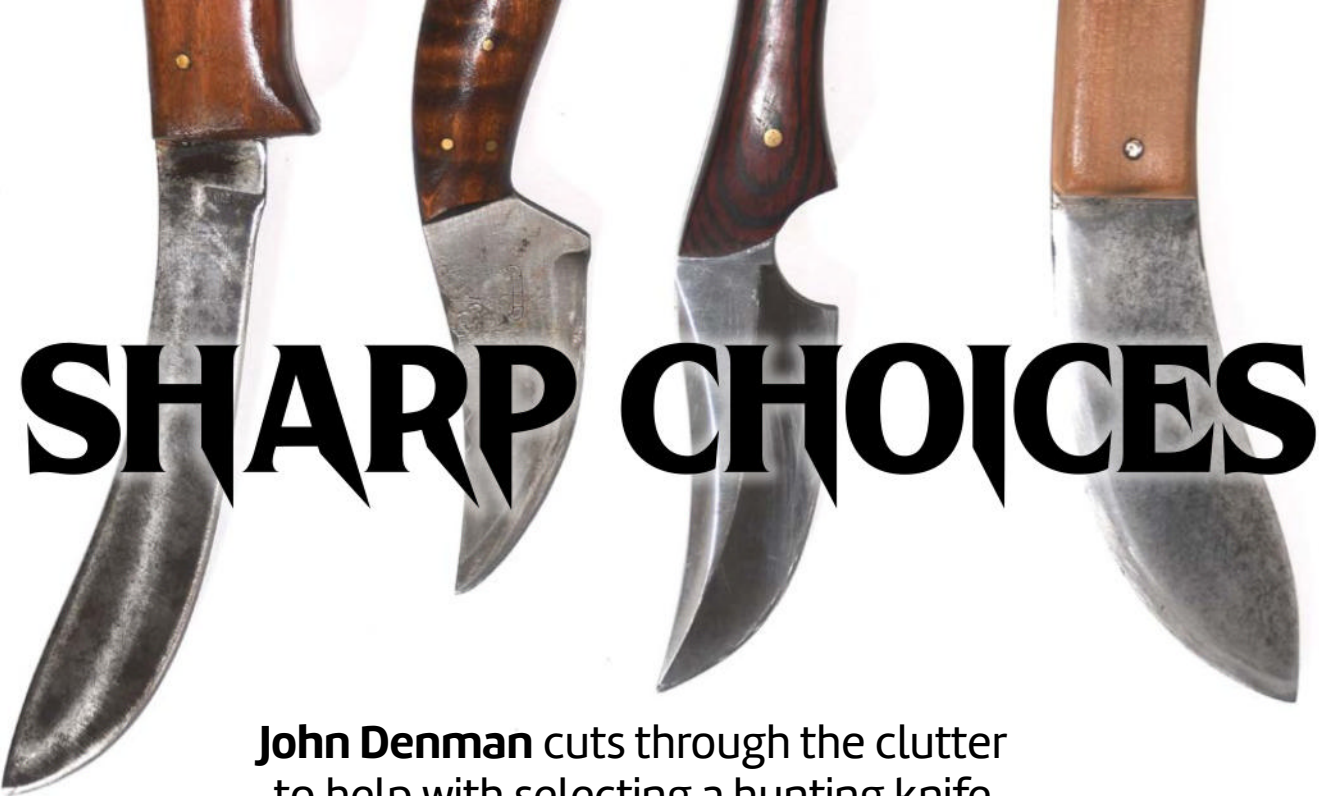
Yep, that did it, onward and inward he came. Every time he stopped to hesitate, I squealed some more, and he was tempted a little closer. Slipping through the wires of the boundary fence he came up in an arc with nose held high trying to circle downwind to check the breeze. At 80yds he was in the shade from the setting sun and sat down with curiosity written on his face as I lay prone over the bipod and settled the cross-hairs on his chest. The rifle cracked into the late afternoon and reached out with a delayed bullet strike and solid hit. He crumpled into a lifeless pile with that pleasing thud drifting on the late afternoon breeze.

He was a large dog fox and bigger in body than the others from earlier in the day. He made me earn him that was for sure.

I placed my foxes out in a row for a photo in the late afternoon glow. It was another reminder to me that if you put the .17 HMR in the right spot, it'll drop the lot! ■



Some say the .17HMR is too light for use on foxes, but certainly not with the correct projectile and placement.



SHARP CHOICES

John Denman cuts through the clutter to help with selecting a hunting knife

As long as we humans have hunted for meat, there has been a need for the means of processing it. Way back, sharpened stones were used, then flint was found to be able to produce a sharp edge when 'knapped' by some long-forgotten craftsmen. Bronze and iron followed, but it wasn't until the forging of steel evolved that knives became closer to what we have today.

Choosing a good hunting knife can be a tough call for someone not too sure of what to look for. The term hunting knife is a bit misleading to begin with. There are a number of jobs your knife may be called upon to handle but mainly it will be gutting and skinning the game you've shot.

This generally sets it apart, from say, a camp knife. For a start, on a hunting knife the edge must be razor sharp, so you don't use it for mundane tasks like whittling a bit of wood. Other considerations include the length of the blade, how the edge is ground, and the shape of the blade.

As gutting and skinning are two completely different jobs, they also require different attributes in a knife. My preference in a gutting knife is a drop point. This tends to minimise the chance of the knife point snagging the gut bag. A skinning knife on the other hand will have a noticeably upswept blade.

So, your first hurdle is to sort through the bewildering selection of cutlery in your local gunshop. In this case, cheap is not always cheerful. The blade, and the steel it's made from, are the most important considerations, and good steel isn't cheap.

Nearly everyone goes for stainless steel blades, but there's a lot of difference in the grade of stainless. Don't scoff at carbon steel either. Yes, it will rust if you don't care for it, but I've seldom ever seen a carbon steel blade that isn't easy to get an edge on. What's more, they tend to keep an edge well too. And with normal care they won't rust. A light patina on the steel is okay and will help resist rusting.

Holding a knife that you intend to buy will firstly bring your attention to the handle. It needs to sit in your hand well and provide a good grip, even when slick with blood. With your fingers just a short distance from a length of finely sharpened blade, you don't want your hand to slip.

Handles, or scales, come in a wide variety of materials. Like much of our gear, synthetic handles are becoming popular, but well-designed scales made from wood or deer antler are still good, and ideal for the knife owner with a sense of the traditional.

As far as edges are concerned, there are basically two varieties: hollow ground or flat. Both have their adherents, but

I prefer the flat ground blade. Hollow ground blades are no harder to get a good edge on, but where some clean slicing is required the flat ground blade slips through the meat a bit better.

Also, hollow ground blades tend to be a bit heavier than flat ground ones. This makes them ideal if hacking through tough gristle or even light bone, but less suitable for more subtle tasks such as skinning. Another feature that's mostly found on the



A cleaver can be handy for breaking down a carcass.

heavier hollow ground blade is a gut hook. This can be a handy thing for running up the belly skin. The gut hook is designed so that it's highly unlikely that the gut bag will get punctured.

So, you can easily find yourself carrying maybe three knives, which is a good reason to try and keep weight down. Although one decent knife can do most jobs, it's not uncommon for a bit of a collection to take place. A gutting knife with a drop point and a good curve on the cutting edge will usually do both jobs. But if you don't mind some extras, go for a gutting knife, skinning knife and maybe a lock blade for some smaller jobs or simply as a spare knife.

As I said, carbon steel knives will rust if not cared for. But then so will some stainless blades. There are numerous grades of stainless steel, but the two most of us will come across are 420 and 440 grade. On a quality knife the grade should be stamped on the blade. The one you need to look for in a hunting knife is the 440 grade. It has a .95 to 1.2 per cent carbon content and will hold an edge better than the 420 grade, which is softer and needs to be sharpened more frequently. The 420 grade is more often found in diving knives due to being more rust resistant.

For a fixed blade knife, a decent sheath is pretty much essential. It's a sad fact that not every factory knife has a sheath



Hollow ground blade with a gut hook.

that suits it 100 per cent. The best sheath material remains leather, even though it doesn't have the 'tacti-cool' look. A well-made leather sheath will be created to fit the knife, and when properly made will enclose the knife in a way that clips and loops won't be needed.

I've found that if the original sheath doesn't do the job, a good saddler or leather worker can fix it for you. An attached sheath for a small sharpening steel can be a good addition and keeps everything in one place. I almost never wear my sheath knives on my belt. When you wear a pack, even a light one, the knife can get in the way if your pack has waist

straps. The knife is also less likely to be lost if it's safe inside the pack.

As far as sharpening your knife is concerned, this is a skill that every aspiring hunter should acquaint themselves with. I realise there's any number of sharpening tools around, call me old fashioned, but I still prefer a good stone. It may sound a bit gross, but I like to lubricate the stone by spitting on it. You can argue the health benefits or otherwise to your heart's content, but I have yet to find a better way of getting decent edge on a knife.

Even a very fine stone will leave a few microscopic rough bits on the edge, so I keep a piece of wood with some fine leather stretched over it and strop the knife back and forth over the leather. I also scrape off the slurry on the stone onto the leather. It creates a nice fine medium to strop the edge with.

After the hunt, even before you get home, make sure your knife is given a good clean up. Blood will lodge in all sorts of places and giving the blade and handle a good scrub with fresh water means you won't be pulling it out of the sheath on your next hunt covered in crusted blood, and probably stinking.

Before you put the knife away, give the sheath a rub down with some leather preserver like Dubbin, and sharpen the knife so it's ready to go on the next hunt. Basically, you care for your knives just like you care for your rifle. Both are as important as each other to another successful hunt. ■



Custom-made sheaths with fittings for a small sharpening steel.

The accuracy TWINs

Matthew Cameron on why projectile seating depth and neck tension are crucial for the reloader



Of all the items that affect rifle accuracy, perhaps none have as much effect as the area surrounding the neck and the mouth of the cartridge case. You might have the best rifle in the world but ignoring the cartridge's seating depth and the tension on the projectile will affect accuracy. What on the surface appears to be inconsequential is a veritable minefield of misinformation when we talk about accuracy. All items are interconnected, change one and you alter the rest, the good news is that what we cover is under the control of the reloader.

The very first consideration about cartridge case tension relates to just who made the cases. True, all cases will have the same external dimensions as they must conform with SAAMI standards. But if we weigh the cases according to brands and check the neck thickness with a tubing micrometre there will be differences. The normal .243 Win cases in my reloading cupboard are made by Winchester and Remington in America, Lapua in Finland and ADI in Australia. The normal Lapua cases are of custom quality, and I reckon the ADI brass is of equal quality.

The average neck thickness is:

- Winchester: .0135"
- Remington: .0144"
- Lapua: .0140"
- ADI Standard .243W: .0146"
- ADI .308W: .0160"

Thus, from this initial measurement, it can be reasonably claimed that ADI brass would impose the greatest grip on any

given projectile in an untrimmed state. In addition, with a projectile seated in the neck of such cases, because of the extra outside diameter the axis of the projectiles will be more co-incident with the bore of the rifle. A slight difference perhaps, but remember accuracy is the summations of many parts.

In the beginning, we must make decisions about projectile type and the powder to propel it, ensuring the selected projectile is compatible with the barrel twist of the rifle.

In addition, the type of projectile may have another further effect depending on whether it is flat-based or has some form of boat-tail. A singular question invariably opens another multitude of others.

To ensure that the best accuracy is obtainable from any rifle projectile combination, the reloader must ensure that the twist of the barrel will stabilise the chosen projectile. If a projectile is on the edge of stability, it is better to choose another more stable projectile that will over time be more consistent.

It is merely a function of projectile length and velocity; the necessary calculations can be accessed via the Berger website and some computer programs. In round figures, the boat-tailed projectile will require a twist rate approximately 1" faster than flat-based for the same weight. At high projectile weights and calibres, this may be the deciding factor if the barrel will stabilise a particular projectile. Once sure that the two are compatible, we can now work on the case neck to extract the absolute best the rifle is capable of.

The quality of the ammunition is irrelevant if these initial criteria are not met.

To ensure some initial consistency, all new cases should be lubricated and run through your normal decapping and sizing die. At this point, it's possible to measure the amount of 'grip' imposed on the shank of the projectile by the case mouth. Ballistic Tools (in the USA) makes several case mouth and neck tension gauges for popular calibres. In the case of .22 calibre mouths, the gauge is cut on .224/.221/.218 and .215" diameters. It is immediately apparent what a case mouth size is, either via a normal expander button or one reduced in size by a selected bushing. I sort cases according to size using these gauges, which is better than no measurement at all. It is another addition to the array of measurements and processes that provide the most accurate ammunition.

The amount of grip on the projectile shanks alters just how a case shoots. It is a complex subject but ignore it at your peril. The starting point must be the thickness of the case neck, which varies between makers so is best measured with a tubing micrometre.

Benchrest and shooters of custom rifles with fitted necks turn case necks because they must – their custom rifle chambers are machined to fit a smaller than normal case neck. The logic behind this is twofold, the amount of neck expansion when the case is fired is controlled and thin necks are easier to reduce in size via a bushing in a straight-line reloading die.



While many issues affect case mouth tension and/or grip, the one that appears to have the most effect is annealing, or lack of it. Work hardening of the brass case occurs at every stage of use. If you don't do anything about it, eventually the case neck has no grip at all, and the new projectile will simply slide into the case without any resistance. As the ductile property of the case changes due to work hardening, so does the velocity, affecting accuracy. Annealing prevents this by restoring the ductile properties of the brass to its original state. Cases should be annealed after every firing. While this may be considered by some as extreme, many Benchrest shooters do so for supreme accuracy.

The use of straight-line dies or dies with internal bushings to reduce the size of case necks by a specific amount may require some experimentation. While convention suggests a reduction of .002" less than the loaded round, you might find with thinner than normal necks a greater amount of reduction is required. Unfortunately, there is no magic formula to discover the correct amount, it is simply a matter of trial and error.

When we come to the seating of the projectile, we open a proverbial can of worms! The first issue depends on whether the rifle is a factory or custom model. With the custom rifle there are choices. With factory rifles, other than the fact that those chambered for Weatherby cartridges will normally have a longer throat, you must accept how the factory has cut the chamber. The other issue with

the factory rifle is whether it is a single shot or fitted with a magazine.

Annealing and/or ultrasonic cleaning of cases will remove the carbon residue, providing a form of lubrication on the insides of necks when seating another projectile. This may be replaced by dry lubricant (graphite) if considered necessary, although this basic 'lubrication' may play a part in the firing sequence.

Normally, overall cartridge length is controlled by the magazine, and this is specified in reloading manuals. However, there is no guarantee that this overall length is the most accurate for the individual projectile. If the best accuracy is obtained with a length longer than the magazine, you can load individual rounds up to the point where the ogive of the projectile comes up against the lands of the barrel.

Another problem that occurs when we start altering seating depth is the relationship between the neck of the case and the amount of the projectile within the neck. Changing the relationship will change the amount of grip imposed.

There is a lot of rubbish written about the pressure increase when a projectile is in touch with the lands of the barrel. If in the normal course of events, a load is developed under such conditions, there shouldn't be any problems. Certainly, there is potential for a rise in pressure when a load is developed off the lands and another projectile is substituted that looks the same. If the distance to the projectile's ogive is longer then a problem may arise.

Aside from any other factors, the seating depth of an individual projectile may well depend on whether it's either flat or boat-tailed. In the simplest of terms, flat-based projectiles are not fussed about seating depth but boat-tailed are a different kettle of fish and can be very touchy regarding length. The real problem with boat-tailed projectiles is that there is again no magic formula to discover the most correct seating depth. What is certain is that such projectiles almost invariably produce their best groups when 'off the lands'.

It is very much a shoot-and-see situation to discover which distance the projectile prefers. Berger has an excellent description on their website on how to conduct

the process. You start with the projectile seated into the lands of the barrel and reduce it by a specific amount for each group of shells – one group will be better than the other.

With some there is little difference, and a recent experience with the .243 Ackley cartridge was enlightening. The projectiles had the same nose profile and weight at 103gr. The boat-tailed version proved to be superbly accurate with good velocity, but I did wonder if a flat-based version would be much different.

To find out I had Brisbane projectile maker Gary Little make up a batch of 50 with flat bases. The short story is, there was not much difference between the two. With the same powder charge and primers, the boat-tailed version just shaded its flat-based cousin by 13fps in average velocity but there was nothing between them in terms of overall accuracy.

I have used a variety of projectiles with rebated boat-tails and am not sure exactly where the distinctions begin or for that matter end. Do you class the Nosler AccuBond projectile as a boat-tail? To me, it resembles more of a bevel.

We have discussed most of the problems associated with projectile grip and seating depth, overall, a complex subject whereby minor changes in one item affects every other item in a small way. ■

ADI .308W brass converted to .243 Ackley; it has a thick neck in relative terms.



A hunter's **ULTIMATE** bucket list

With a goal to complete them all,
David Duffy shares his top 10 pursuits

Many start out hunting for perhaps a rabbit as the first species and after several of those, may move on to a fox if they are present in the area. A pig could possibly then feature and maybe a deer. Some decide they like to hunt mainly one species, such as sambar, red deer or wild dogs, and can become entirely proficient at hunting that animal.

However, it's not unusual for those who have been hunting for a while to have a bucket list of animals that they would like to hunt, and hopefully be successful. This bucket list is a personal thing, different for each hunter, and may change with time and with more knowledge and experience.

One doesn't need to be a trophy hunter to have such a list. I usually like to hunt for meat, and at the same time keep an eye out for a great set of horns or antlers,

but also like to experience a great hunt as opposed to just collecting trophies. Having a list of game that you really want to hunt provides a goal that once achieved, brings a greater level of satisfaction.

The following is my top 10 bucket list in approximate order, starting with the first deer that, after shooting other stags, I wanted most before I became interested in other species. Some on the list I have achieved, others I'm still working on.



A Nile crocodile shot in Mozambique on a spot and stalk hunt with .338 Win Mag and 225gr TTSX.

1. Free-range royal red deer

A 'royal' red deer has six tines on each side. One that is running in the wild, as opposed to on a high-fenced estate, is truly a regal specimen to obtain. Perhaps it's their roar in the rut, together with the splendid antlers, that make them so desirable to me. They are not necessarily our hardest deer to hunt, but getting a free-range double-six took me 10 years to achieve. This included trying to get onto a good one in New South Wales' Hunter Valley numerous times, trips to Brisbane Valley in Queensland and two New Zealand South Island free-range hunts, passing up 5x5s and others.

Eventually, I shot one in southern NSW with my .270 Win after several attempts were thwarted by extreme heat keeping the deer hidden under cover.

2. Large crocodile

Our saltwater crocodiles are the largest crocodiles in the world but hunting them was stopped in Australia in the early 1970s. The Nile crocodile from Africa is the second largest and they can be shot. After reading articles on crocodiles being pursued, I watched an exhilarating video of a spot and stalk crocodile hunt in Africa. It was as exciting as it gets, and I decided that it was something I wanted to experience.

I tried to contact the guide who had done the spot and stalk crocodile hunt in the video, only to find that he had been killed by an elephant falling on him after his client shot it. Eventually, after much

searching, I was steered toward another guide who specialised in spot and stalk crocodile hunts on the Zambesi River in Mozambique. Ultimately, this was probably my best hunt and I bagged an exceptional trophy. The full story will appear in *Australian Hunter* this year.

The .338 225gr TTSX recovered after passing through the spine at the neck on the massive croc only weighed 140gr and had lost all its petals. The difficulty with crocodiles is trying to get close enough to them for a dead-right-there shot without them jumping into the water. To kill them on the spot you need to shoot them in the brain or break their neck, which requires precision shooting.

3. Cape buffalo

I had hunted several of the bovine species, including quite a few scrub cattle and water buffaloes, but after reading about the vindictive African Cape buffalo I just had to hunt one, no matter what it took. So off I went to Zambia with my .450 Rigby and 500gr Woodleighs to hunt what some consider to be the most dangerous game in the world (others consider lions more dangerous).

The pleasing part of this hunt was that right at the end of the day after tracking and following a herd of Cape buffaloes all day unsuccessfully, when walking back to the Land Rover to head back to camp, I spotted two old 'dagga boys' by themselves. I broke the spine of the bull with one shot at 110yds and my guide reckons he's never seen a

Cape buffalo go down so quickly. The salt that was used on the hide was of poor quality and when I received it, the cape was no good. I just have the skull and horns.

4. 30" sambar

Although I have made a fair number of trips to Victoria in search of a 30" sambar stag, I haven't achieved a really good stag yet. I tend to hunt the heavily wooded areas which are most accessible to me, rather than the privately owned fringe country where many sambar hunters have success. I should have followed my own advice and spent more time hunting sambar instead of the other deer species that I didn't desire quite as much (except a royal red).

The 33" rusa and the 30" chital heads I have, though very attractive, aren't the same as getting a massive sambar. Also, I don't hunt them with dogs and prefer to be unguided. A huge symmetrical sambar is to me one of the best possible trophies in the world. I use a .338 RCM with 225gr Woodleighs on most sambar sojourns.

5. Whitetail deer

Legendary writer Jack O'Connor's favourite deer were the diminutive Coues (pronounced 'cows') deer that he hunted in Sonora and Arizona. These are a type of whitetail deer. Whitetails grow much bigger in the colder northern parts of the North American continent. He believed that the Coues deer were smarter than their northern counterparts. Reading O'Connor's



This 12-point red stag was shot in southern NSW. It was dark by the time David returned with the camera.



A Cape buffalo shot in Zambia with a .450 Rigby and 500gr Woodleighs.

A hunter's ultimate bucket list

stories of Coues deer hunts made me want to hunt them myself, plus whitetail are the most widely hunted deer in North America.

I hunted mine in Sonora, Mexico, and it was one of the most enjoyable hunts that I have been on. In the spiky desert vegetation, they camouflage so well that it takes the expert eyes of Mexican guides to spot them. Finding a suitable rest when you do see them is another issue. I used 90gr Sciroccos from my .240 Page Souper Pooper.

6. Hog deer

I became interested in hunting hog deer after listening to old-timers at (now deceased) Ken Leatham's hunting cabin near Mansfield in Victoria on several of my sambar hunting trips. These small but stocky deer are often hunted from a high stand where you silently wait in the hope that a decent one will come your way. It was quite different hunting in this manner. Climbing up an extension ladder in the dark before daylight and waiting for hours in the cold and in the late afternoon with the mosquitoes biting any flesh they can find is an experience in itself.

I shot a superb free-range hog deer. I really wanted to use my 6.8 SPC II on hog deer but the case doesn't meet minimum length, so I used 110gr Sierra Pro-Hunters out of my .270 Win instead.

7. Camel

For quite a while I really wanted to hunt a camel but it's not that easy getting access to a property to hunt them on. I went to one property in Queensland and the few camels on it were too tame for me to want to shoot them. I eventually went to the Red Centre for camels. Hunting large game in the desert in Outback Australia is a unique experience. I was expecting close-range shots but the two bull camels I shot were at 320 and 475 paces respectively.

I really enjoyed eating the camel steaks after hunting them in a hostile environment, where despite being so flat and open it is easy to get lost and in big trouble. The camels wander great distances and being lucky enough to find them is the hardest part. Stalking them on the flat terrain can also be difficult because they know you are there and keep their distance. I



An Outback feral camel.

used my .338 Winchester Magnum loaded with 225gr Barnes TSX but after that hunt switched to the .225 TTSX for the benefits of a higher BC bullet at longer distances.

8. 500-yard crow

I became interested in varminting with my .220 Swift after I began to extend the range I was shooting rabbits and crows with my .222. Crows are very much on the ball, and usually fly off as soon as they see you. Although I have shot a reasonable number of both varmints over 400yds, I seldom get the opportunity for a 500yd shot. The properties I hunt on don't often present such shots and if they do, I usually don't have my .220 Swift in my hands. Nevertheless, a crow at 500yds or more is my varminting goal.

9. Magnificent fallow

A good fallow head with its beautiful pal-mated antlers is a magnificent looking deer. Fallows are our most abundant deer species and the deer I've shot the most of, mostly with a .270 Win or .270 Redding, followed by red deer. They are not our hardest deer to get but I would sincerely love an exceptional free-range unguided fallow that's better than the one I have hanging on my wall.

10. Banteng and water buffalo

I couldn't decide which of these two I wanted more, so I placed them equal 10th. Bantengs are more elusive than water buffaloes and there are fewer of them, making them harder to find. I shot a good water buffalo with very thick bosses long before I shot a banteng. I've shot two water buffaloes with my .338 Win Mag, using 250gr Barnes X bullets and a banteng with my .450 Rigby using 500gr Woodleighs.

There are other species which are no longer able to be hunted that would make my top 10, such as the gaur, the largest bovine. Some species can still be hunted, but cost so much that unfortunately, I won't be able to hunt them. Therefore, they are not included on my bucket list. For example: Marco Polo sheep, dwarf buffalo and Lord Derby eland. Nevertheless, I will be pleased if I achieve my listed top 10. ■



David shot this banteng in Arnhem Land with a .450 Rigby and 500gr Woodleighs.



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Bite your tongue

Bovine tongue is often overlooked but **Jan Kaptein** says to cut it out!

The words 'do not let anything go to waste' are what I hear in the back of my mind when taking an animal for the pot. Unfortunately, there are some practical issues when taking large animals in remote places. Bantengs or scrub bulls are among those large animals that are nigh impossible to gut and clean to take the whole carcass. This means that a lot of usable meat and bones go to waste. While almost anyone will take the back fillets, and other choice cuts, the tongue is often overlooked.

The struggle to cut the tongue out may be one of the reasons it is often not taken. While experimentation is encouraged, I have two preferred approaches. The first is to slice from the corners of the mouth to allow dropping the lower jaw. From there, grab a long slim knife, lift the tongue with one hand and slice the tongue off with the tip angled down slightly. This will get you most of the meat. Alternatively, slice vertically down in the middle of the lower jaw. Start about in the middle, down towards the neck to expose the underside of the tongue, then cut where it is attached. Do not just cut the tip you can see in the mouth; it will mean you get little meat. Of course, you can also talk to your local butcher or abattoir and ask them to get you some tongues. If you do, ask for calf tongues as they are often slightly more tender.

An average tongue will typically weigh between 700–1500g, depending on the size of the animal and the way it was removed. While perfectly edible, the back and bottom part at the very end of the tongue may need a little trim. Just remove any tough tendon or cartilage you find. I generally soak my tongues in lightly salted water for a day or two to draw out any remaining blood. This makes the meat whiter and enhances the taste. It is, however, not necessary and purely a personal preference.

Starting with a clean tongue that is ready to cook, you will need little in terms of equipment. A large pan with lid that allows you to put the tongue(s) in it and covered with water and a small sharp knife and spoon to remove the skin after cooking will do it.

Ingredients

- 1 or more tongues
- 1 large onion
- 2–3 bay leaves
- 8 cloves
- Salt.

A single tongue will feed 3–4 people, but considering the cooking time and how easy it is to cook two or three at once, it is worth doing if you have them.

Method

1. Arrange the tongue/s at the bottom of a large pan.
2. Add water to fully submerge the tongue/s.
3. Peel a large onion and use cloves to pin the bay leaves to it, then put it in the pan.
4. Add salt to taste.
5. Turn on the heat and bring to a rolling boil, then turn to a low simmer and cover.
6. Cook for about 2–3 hours, checking occasionally to ensure all meat remains fully submerged.



Make sure to fully submerge the tongue/s in the pan.



Fried tongue on toast with eggs tastes sensational.

7. Once the meat is ready, remove it from the cooking liquid to cool slightly.

While two hours is normally sufficient, you can use a meat fork or other sharp object to test whether the tongue is fully cooked. It is done when the meat is tender and easy to pierce.

Once cooked, there is a little chore, which is removing the skin. Let the tongue cool slightly to avoid getting burnt. The

skin turns rubbery when cooked and is easy to remove. While you could peel it off by hand or cut it away, I use a spoon. Make a small tear or begin at the edge and slide the spoon between the skin and the flesh with the hollow side toward the meat. From there, pull the skin away with one hand while pushing the spoon forward to separate it from the flesh. Any of the thin and flexible skin towards the throat end of the tongue can either be left on or trimmed off with a sharp little knife.

Once removed, you are good to go. Use tongue as a substitute for other meats in curries, or in any other dish. Recently cooked tongue can also just be sliced and eaten instead of other types of meat. It is great with a vinaigrette or mustard sauce, accompanied by mashed potatoes and greens. My personal favourite is to let the tongue cool then slice it. The slices are quickly seared on both sides in a hot frying pan and placed on a piece of toast with mustard mayonnaise. Add a fried egg or two to complete the dish.

Once cooked and with the skin removed, tongue will keep in the cooking liquid for a few days if cooled. Alternatively, use cling wrap to seal air out and keep the tongue in the fridge. I often freeze tongues until I have a few to prepare at the same time and have never had issues using defrosted tongues. The same is true for prepared



Use a spoon with the hollow side towards the flesh to easily separate the skin from the meat.

tongues. I vacuum pack them and they freeze and defrost well, without any apparent loss of taste or quality.

The versatility of the meat is fantastic and you can even reuse the cooking liquid as broth by reducing it and seasoning to taste. Very little goes to waste and you will be surprised how fantastic tongue tastes and how tender the meat is. Of all the 'off-cuts' I bring home, tongue is a favourite among family and friends. ■



Use cloves to pin the bay leaves to the onion for easier removal after cooking.

SCRUBGUN goods

Bergara, Sightron and Hornady a winning combination for **Don Caswell**

A scrub gun must be a short, pointy, light rifle with open or red dot sights and simple classical stock design. You don't want anything that's going to get snagged or caught up on tight, clawing scrub. Rifles with long barrels, huge scopes, thumbhole stocks and bipods need not apply. Ranges are mostly 5–50m. Calibres are best at .30 or bigger.

With the opportunity to hunt pigs and deer in thick scrub, and with plans for sambar, I was obliged to consider another rifle. Where I hunt, sambar have a minimum calibre requirement that excludes the .243 Win. In open country, I am totally confident in my .243 Win for dropping game with carefully placed shots. In the scrub, however, I

appreciate the need for more authority and picked up a .308 Win. It has the extra energy sought after, with a lot of good factory ammo available for that calibre.

A single-shot rifle maximises compactness and pointiness, offering no disadvantage in firepower. However, for those hunters wanting a repeater, an ideal scrub gun would be one of the lever actions. In pushing through thick scrub, expecting fleeting close encounters at any moment, it pays to have a round in the chamber.

I avoid carrying cocked rifles with the safety on, so an ideal solution is the manual cocking available on many types of single-shot rifles and the lever actions. It is the safest, and fastest, method of carrying a firearm ready for a split-second opportunity.

With a preference for single-shot rifles, it was these considerations that led me to the Bergara BA13 in .308 Win, fitted with a Sightron SRS-2 red dot reflex sight and using Hornady Superformance ammunition. Bergara, Sightron and Hornady are distributed in Australia by Herron Security & Sport, along with a wide range of other products and brands.

Rifles do not come any more compact than the Bergara BA13. With an overall length of 80cm, the bare rifle weighs 2.9kg. Fitting the Sightron SRS-2 only adds another 35g to the rig.

Another useful feature for scrub and mountain hunters is that the BA13 is a take-down rifle. Without the need for any tools, the rifle can be disassembled into



Don's scrub gun combo: Bergara BA13 rifle, Sightron SRS-2 sight and Hornady Superformance ammo.

three pieces in a matter of seconds. If you are fighting your way through some particularly thick scrub or scrambling about on steep slopes, the BA13 can be taken down and stowed in your backpack to give you two free hands and no slung rifle flapping about awkwardly.

Initially, I was resigned to losing significant velocity and energy to the Bergara's stubby 16.5" barrel. Many sources have tested velocity loss with reduced barrel length and the reported result is generally about 23fps per inch of barrel length. So, for a nominal 150gr .308 muzzle velocity of 2820fps from a 24" barrel, I could expect to get 2650fps from the short Bergara BA13.

My choice of projectile was 150gr to get the best blend of velocity and weight. I generally aim for the high shoulder, or hilar, shot that ensures anchoring game on the spot. For this shot, the higher velocity provides greater hydrostatic shock to the animal for emphatic knock-down and good internal bleed-out. As I considered the various choices of factory loaded 150gr projectiles, I began to appreciate the clear advantage of Hornady's Superformance loadings.

Hornady Superformance gives 100–200fps extra velocity over other brands in all calibres. It achieves that with a progressive propellant burn that is tailored to each calibre and projectile. Hornady state there is no significant increase in pressure, recoil or muzzle blast. I have to say that, off the bench, the Superformance gave a clear impression of more 'zing', associated with the higher muzzle velocity.

Chronograph data shows a tight standard deviation and low spread for Hornady



The Bergara BA13 takes down in mere seconds without tools.

Superformance ammo, which contributes to fine accuracy. And, better yet, Hornady Superformance .308 Win loadings have about 14fps velocity loss per inch of reduced barrel length. When combined, those factors result in the Bergara BA13 having pretty much the same muzzle velocity as standard factory ammo from a 24" barrel. That higher muzzle velocity generates significantly higher projectile energy which, when combined with the Hornady SST projectile's excellent terminal ballistics, delivers emphatic kills on deer and boars.

I tested the difference in delivered energy for Hornady Superformance and standard 150gr .308 Winchester ammo from a Bergara BA13. Also .243 Win and .30–30 Win muzzle energy for comparison. In simple terms, the Hornady Superformance delivers 20 per cent greater energy than standard .308 Win

ammo in the Bergara BA13, and 33 per cent more than my Merkel K3 in .243 Win.

For initial testing, I fitted a Zeiss 3–9x40 scope to better access the accuracy of the Hornady Superformance ammo. However, I then switched over to the Sightron SRS–2 reflex sight. This is a compact sight, made of aluminium, that imposes a red dot in the line of sight through the 25mm 1x optical glass lens. The red dot covers 2 MOA and enables fast target acquisition and shot placement. The 2 MOA illuminated dot is fine enough to allow accurate shot placement out past 100m as well.

The SRS–2 is powered by a CR2032 3V lithium battery which gives about 300 hours of operating time. The unit will automatically power-down after five hours of inactivity. The SRS–2 is rated for Magnum handguns, so a .308 Win rifle poses no problem for it. Sighting adjustments are in 1 MOA clicks, which is fine for a scrub gun. A button provides 10 choices of intensity for the illuminated dot.

In my field testing I was more than happy. The Sightron SRS–2 red dot makes for fast target acquisition and the short Bergara BA13 is unimpeded by thick scrub. When I chanced onto game, the rifle came up well to my shoulder and I thumbed the cocking lever to fire as the red dot settled on the target. It makes for very quick shooting.

And, being a single-shot rifle, there's no significant disadvantage either. When chasing game in thick scrub you would be lucky to get a second shot on target, even if you were armed with a semi-auto. ■



Don in the scrub, with his thumb on the cocking hammer.

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN



Jeff Martin remembers his late mate
through African adventures of a lifetime

Above: Matt's black springbok.

Main: Matt's memorial sign – L to R:
John, Rian, Newell, Francois and Jeff.



A while back my hunting mate Matt Norton had been going through a tough time. To help take his mind off things I invited him on a trip to South Africa with our mutual friend, Newell Lock, for a mostly plains game hunt.

Newell and I had been over on safari before and made great friends with the Raubenheimer family who operate Bitouwsfontein, an 8000-acre game ranch situated 200km north of Port Elizabeth in the Winterberg mountains in the middle of the Eastern Cape. Once Matt understood the relative low cost of hunting in South Africa he jumped at the opportunity. After that first trip, he was so blown away by the quality of the animals and the challenges of hunting in this unique mountainous semi-desert terrain covered in thorn bush, spekboom trees and loose shaley rocks that he decided to return with us again.

Bitouwsfontein is in the middle of the famous Karoo, however in the mountains in what they term the 'Succulent Karoo' because of the abundance of spekboom. This means that, in addition to the karoo bush, ground covers and native grasses, there is plenty of feed for the browsing animals – in particular, the grey ghost that is the greater (southern) kudu. At about the same latitude as Sydney and with their rainy season occurring in summer, hunting in winter at Bitouws is usually pleasant and sunny, with chilly mornings.

Hunting kudu in this environment is challenging, similar to hunting sambar deer in the Victorian High Country, a passion for Matt and his four brothers. I should explain that Matt was a good, albeit sometimes unorthodox, sambar hunter. He derived great pleasure in telling everyone of taking a 29" sambar while out hunting with his trusty hound – the family's pet French bulldog.

Apparently, the tale goes that one winter's morning the feisty Frenchie bailed a big ol' stag on the opposite side of a gully and the stag was so intent on stomping on the pesky little intruder that he was oblivious to Matt lining him up from 180yds on the other side. A solid shot, animal down, with the pesky agitator now trying to rip the dead stag's ears off, and the rest is history. After that Matt reckoned his diminutive



Matt's 'Weatherby eyebrow' kudu.

family pet could match it with the best hunting dogs out there.

On both his African trips, Matt took his trusty Mauser deer hunting rifle in .300 Win Mag topped with a Nightforce 20x scope. A bit over-scoped but otherwise perfect for the mostly large African plains game available. Ammo, in our preferred Barnes or equivalent projectiles, was sourced over there by our hosts to save us the hassle (and additional weight) of travelling with it.

On that first trip, Matt harvested a kudu, gemsbok, zebra, waterbuck, blue wildebeest, warthog and impala. On his second trip he added the common, black and copper springbok, a red hartebeest, bushbuck, eland, sable, another cracking kudu (with 2" of ivory at the tips) and a huge warthog.

Matt's first kudu was a particular highlight as, being caught on a tight angle on the edge of a 'kloof', he earned a decent 'Weatherby eyebrow' in the process. When he enquired of PH Cookie after the shot if he got him, all Cookie could say was, "well there's blood!" – referring of course not to the animal, which had dropped on the spot, but rather to the stream of red ink now flowing down Matt's face.

Matt's 2018 warthog taken at 428yds was also special because he was shooting off sticks, a particular challenge for those not used to them. Matt's infectious smile couldn't be wiped from his face for days.

In June 2019, Matt hunted predominantly with Francois as his PH. Francois is property owner John Raubenheimer's nephew and a farmer in the Free State. When he's not

Gone but not forgotten

busy on the farm or as a PH, Francois is a professional jackal hunter who Matt had the pleasure of going out a few nights with, taking several wily black-backed jackals.

I was privileged to share one particularly memorable hunt with Matt during our trip in 2019. I had arranged to hunt a buffalo, and in the same area there were several good sables – a sought-after trophy for Matt. As a result, we paired up and along with Rian and Francois (our PHs), a registered 'dangerous game PH' (required for my buff hunt), the ranch owner, a camera man engaged to video the hunt and a tracker, we set off early one morning into the bushveld to share the adventure.

Matt had his trusty .300WM, I had a Blaser R8 in .375 H&H (the minimum calibre allowed for hunting the 'black death') and each of the PHs with even bigger medicine ranging from a .416 Rigby up to the lethal .500 Nitro Express that kills on both ends. Over-gunned you say – they didn't seem to think so!

Armed with all this firepower, and with the knowledge that a young 24-year-old rugby lock had been killed by a buffalo in the same area only weeks before, we nervously set off. My anxiety was elevated further when after confirming with the DG-PH where to place my shot (on the shoulder), I then asked how, if I wounded the animal, would we go about tracking him down? His response, "don't worry about it, he'll find you!"

Matt got a decent sable early on that morning, and then the whole entourage focused on my buffalo. Two old 'dagga boys' (buffaloes) were sighted along a dry riverbed and a plan was made. With thick bush each side this was an area about 600m wide by 2km long and we traversed it for over four hours, bumping the two bulls at close quarters no less than four times without them presenting a shot. On the fifth occasion they were 20ft in front of me behind thick thorn and acacia bushes, but I could only see one black hoof.

Beside me was the DG-PH, behind him Rian, Francois and the ranch owner, then about 10ft further back came Matt and then the camera man behind him. With guns at the ready the DG-PH motioned me to the left to try and get a shot through

the bushes that the two bulls were standing behind. I moved just as the buffaloes realised we were on them and all hell broke loose. With a crashing of trees, the thundering of hooves, and a huge cloud of dust, one animal broke to the left and the other to the right like a pair of departing freight trains, without me getting a shot.

This was not however before Matt, thinking black death was coming straight through the thornbushes at him, unceremoniously lifted the much smaller cameraman and placed him like a human shield between himself and the commotion in front, and then back peddled as fast as he could. Discretion being the better part of valour.



Some unlucky black-backed jackals.



Jeff with his buffalo.

Given we couldn't get those two bulls to shift from the thick stuff, when my DG-PH said if we go in there again, they will charge us, we left them and moved to another part of the property. We eventually found another five good bulls out in the open and I took down a nice 42" dagga boy with thick bosses, and at a safer distance.

Despite the realisation of a trophy of a lifetime, the highlight of my hunt was not the adrenalin rush or the taking of a great animal, but rather Matt's spontaneous attempt at self-preservation, which entertained the whole crew around the braai each evening for the rest of the trip.

Matt was not only a good hunter, but a great bloke. An unassuming gentleman, genuine, no pretence, and a guy who enjoyed his kids, his family and the great outdoors. In Africa, he was enamoured by the animals, the terrain, the people and the simple joy of the hunt. We had a ball together and all who shared these adventures appreciated his company and his friendship.

Unfortunately, in late June 2021 Matt was diagnosed with cancer after going to the doctor because he thought he had broken a couple of ribs playing footy. He was determined to beat the disease for his kids, but alas Matt died in September 2021 after a short but ferocious battle and not seeing his beloved Demons win the flag a couple of days later. All that knew him miss him awfully and I will always cherish the absolute privilege of sharing his African hunting adventures. He was just 39.

In June 2023, Newell and I again travelled to South Africa and Bitouwsfontein to fulfill a promise we had made. While there

we were joined by John, Rian, Francois and Thomie, all of whom had hunted with Matt a few years earlier, and we took the time to hold a memorial for our mate Matt. As requested during his last days, we erected a 'Norton' road sign kindly provided by the family at the site where he shot his

best kudu and from where he also scored his amazing shot on the warthog. A sign to mark the African hunting exploits of a great mate.

For Saachi and Diesel – RIP Matt.

For Bitouwsfontein hunting, contact Rian at bluwater9@gmail.com ■



Matt's sable.



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LESS IS MORE

David Duffy on downsizing to extra-short mild hunting cartridges



Extra-short cartridges L to R: .17-222 with 25gr V-max, .222 with 50gr BlitzKing, 6 SPC with 90gr TKG and 6.8 SPC with 110gr AccuBond.



An angling shot with 90gr TKG in 6 SPC dropped this boar on the spot.

It wasn't so long ago that the magnum craze was upon us, with many figuring the extra power and velocity out of a large rifle cartridge was frequently needed. Now, there's a trend towards smaller, easier to shoot cartridges that allow good shot placement thanks to mild report and recoil. Perhaps improvements in both terminal performance and aerodynamics, as well as new powders allowing smaller cartridges to perform better, have played their part. Many of these diminutive cartridges are being loaded with long, heavy-for-calibre, high ballistic co-efficient (BC) bullets which perform well at distances such as 600m, especially on targets. I'm more interested in using extra-short, mild cartridges for hunting up to about 270m, in areas where the terrain and vegetation don't really necessitate longer shots.

My extra-short action Sako S491 was rebarrelled to 6.8 SPC II in 2007, and since then I have used the rifle as my primary pig gun, but also on goats and smaller

varmints as well. The 6.8 SPC II, together with the .308 Win, are my two-favourite hog chamberings. What the extra-short 6.8 SPC II loses in power to the .308, it makes up for in consistently good shot placement. I've also been using two rifles in 6mm on smaller deer, varmints, goats and boars. After hearing good reports of extra-short mild cartridges in 6mm, such as the 6 SPC – the less powerful .223 necked up to 6mm, and the newer 6 ARC, I contemplated whether a 6 SPC using medium weight 90gr projectiles might surpass my 6.8 SPC II using 110gr bullets.

So, I decided to build an ultra-light rifle in 6 SPC with a 56cm barrel, the same length as on my Sako 6.8 SPC II and test it with the chronograph, on targets and in the field on game, and compare the two cartridges. The performance of the 6.8 SPC II, which has the same bore size as the .270 Win, on game up to medium size has been superb. Nevertheless, the 90gr 6mm bullets, especially the 90gr Sierra Tipped

GameKing with its high BC of .490 and better sectional density, might possibly be even better than the heavier, larger diameter 110s in the 6.8. Especially around the 220–270m mark, which is about as far as I would use either of those cartridges.

Although the 6mm ARC has become a popular factory chambering, I chose the 6 SPC for its flatter trajectory up to 270m with 90gr projectiles for hunting. Also to use a lightweight scope on my rifle to simply point and shoot, without wasting precious time adjusting turrets.

The SPC case has a 23-degree shoulder, feeds better in some rifles and allows five rounds in the magazine, rather than four with the 6mm ARC. Plus, I also have lots of parent 6.8 SPC cases to run through the 6 SPC full-length die to easily form the 6 SPC cases. Usable case capacity when using projectiles up to about 90gr is similar with the 6 ARC and 6 SPC. Longer projectiles start to encroach on powder capacity with the 6 SPC as they can't be seated out as far

Less is more

due to magazine length restrictions, but I won't use heavier than 90–95gr.

I had a Total Solutions Engineering 56cm, one in 8" twist stainless barrel attached to a Howa mini-action and housed in a Pendleton Composite Stock. The flimsy plastic bottom 'metal' was replaced with Oregunsmithing aluminium internal magazine and hinged floor-plate bottom metal. Oregunsmithing make a magazine and follower which is specific to the SPC case. The spring on the trigger only allowed a minimum 3½ pound trigger pull, so I modified the spring to give a 2¾ pound trigger, which is great for a walk around hunting rifle and the same weight as the adjustable trigger on the Sako. I then mounted a Swarovski 3–9 scope in lightweight Talley rings, with the total weight a mere 2.72kg.

My accuracy loads for the 6 SPC, with limited load development because of the shortage of components, are: 28gr AR2208 with Sierra 90gr TGTKs at 2810fps and 28.5gr AR 2208 with Speer 90gr Hot-Cors at 2790fps. With this, always remember to start 10 per cent lower in powder charge and gradually work up, checking for pressure signs. Due to the pointy shape of the high BC Sierra TGTKs, the reamer was specifically designed with a short throat so that accuracy would not suffer by having the bullets jump a long distance to the rifling. The Sierras are seated at 2.425".

In comparison, the accuracy loads for my 6.8 SPC II using AR2219 with 110gr projectiles give the following velocities: Nosler AccuBond 2790fps, Barnes TSX 2800fps and Sierra ProHunter 2820fps. Velocity, using temperature stable powders, is therefore similar in both my rifles. Higher speeds (approx. 100fps more) can be achieved in the 6 SPC with double-based powders such as LEVERevolution, but hot Australian summers and availability are deterrents.

In the field, the ultra-light weight of the 6 SPC rifle makes it wonderful to carry, especially up hills and on longer walks. The Sako 6.8 SPC II at 3.43kg with scope is still a good carry weight though, especially after the modifications. And the medium weight Sako is slightly better for consistently getting good shot placement when shooting off-hand or from a poor rest,



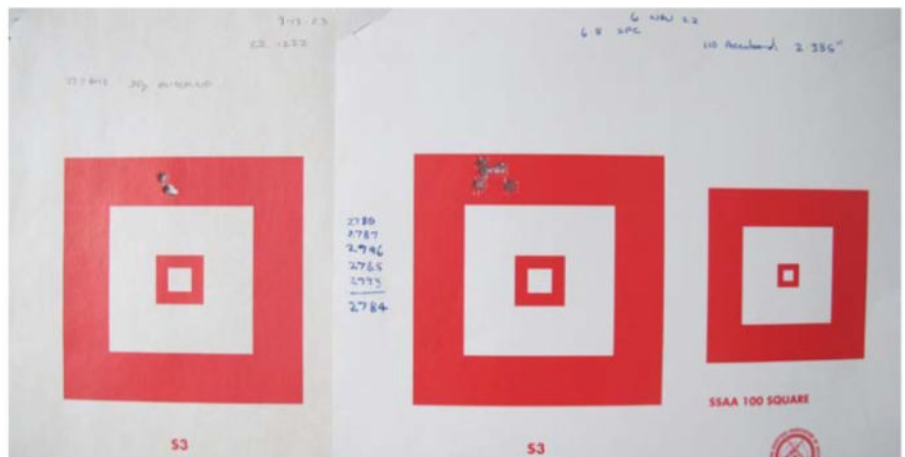
David carries 20 rounds of 6 SPC in his backpack in this small Sierra projectile box.

simply because of the extra weight making it easier to shoot well. The muzzle of my 6 SPC barrel measures .570" whereas the fluted barrel on the 6.8 SPC II measures .600". At the bench the 6.8 SPC shoots tight 5-shot groups, whereas the 6 SPC hasn't shot as well on average with the limited load development and possibly the barrel not fully run-in.

Having five rounds in the magazine with pigs is an advantage both rifles have. The question though, was whether I could tell any difference between the two chamberings at various ranges? I have both rifles sighted-in 57mm high at 90m with the 6.8

wearing a Kahles 2–7 scope as opposed to the 3–9 Swarovski on the 6 SPC.

On a recent hunting trip, four large pigs and a goat were all shot at less than 100m with the 6 SPC. When shot through the shoulder, or through the ribs angling up through the vitals when facing away, the 90gr TGTKs performed exceptionally well, killing them on the spot. However, when shot through the ribs into the lungs on broadside shots, the 90gr TGTKs, which have a thick jacket, exited through the opposite side ribs with only moderate expansion. This also occurred on a lung shot boar with my .240 PSP launching the 90gr TKG



Checking scope adjustment at 100yds, the .222 (L) with 50gr BlitzKings and 6.8 SPC II (R) with 110gr AccuBonds.



David shot this billy through the shoulder with his 6 SPC at about 20m.

at 3240fps, so the moderate expansion isn't a result of the 6 SPC's lower velocity. In this respect, the 6.8 SPC 110gr bullets (ProHunter, TSX and AccuBond) perform better in stopping pigs dead, whether shot through the shoulder or the lungs.

I also have a 6 SPC load for the softer 90gr Speer Hot-Cors which I have used successfully with lung shots. However, I doubt if the Speers will perform as well with shoulder shots through heavy bone as the TGKs do. I prefer the shoulder shot on most game when I can get it, plus the TGKs have a much better BC, so I'll persist with them until I get the opportunity for longer shots.

At 270m, the 6mm 90gr Sierra TGK with .490 BC at 2810fps muzzle velocity is down 16.5cm, with 19.3cm wind-drift in a 16km/h crosswind. The 110gr 6.8 AccuBond, with a lower BC of .370, is down 18.5cm and wind-drift is 22.9cm. These figures favour the 6mm bullet, but not by a huge amount. The higher BC 6mm bullet also retains more of its velocity, which means it impacts at a greater speed on longer shots.

Reduced loads in 6.8 using AR2206H work well on varmints if you want them for the table, but a windage and elevation change to the scope is required from full-power loads. The 6 SPC is great on varmints such as rabbits and crows due to the

reasonably small, slightly expanded bullet hole, but still killing them on the spot with properly placed shots.

A favoured extra-short varmint cartridge is the .222, which launches a 50gr BlitzKing at around 3160fps from its 56cm barrel. The .222 uses fragmenting varmint bullets at higher velocity and is more destructive on small game. However, the stouter 6mm 90gr bullets do not destroy as much meat if you want to eat, say, rabbits, when not headshot.

My .222 is sighted-in 3.8cm high at 90m as opposed to 5.7cm at 90m for the 6 SPC. Sighting the 6 SPC any lower than 5.7cm at 90m reduces its effectiveness for longer shots on medium game. Less allowance on small varmints for trajectory needs to be made with the .222. Nevertheless, the 6 SPC is fine on varmints, though a bit more expensive to run with the Sierra 90gr Tipped GameKings than the .222 using 50gr Sierra BlitzKings.

Once again, my Sako AI .222 is heavier at 3.51kg with scope than my 6 SPC and the .222 has even less recoil than the 6 SPC cartridge. This makes the .222 better at precision shots at small varmints such as crows when shot off-hand or at medium distances from an imperfect rest.

The 6 SPC, like a 6mm and .257, fulfill the dual-purpose role of a varmint and medium game (up to and including fallow deer) cartridge just about better than anything else. Being such a mild, extra-short cartridge, it can be housed in an ultra-light, relatively short rifle. This has some advantages if you are climbing a lot or walking long distances and carrying your rifle in your hands for a quicker shot.

The larger cartridges certainly do have their place, but for hunting a lot of game, extra-short mild cartridges such as the .17-.222 and .222 for varmints, and 6 SPC and 6.8 SPC are fine for 95 per cent of shots, and in many cases give a greater level of satisfaction. ■



David aiming the ultra-light 6 SPC at a boar.

SEEING IS BELIEVING!

Derek Nugent backs up his theory on hybrid deer in his local hunting area

In *Australian Hunter* 87 my article 'Genetics: nature's playbook' looked at the impact of genetics on red deer antler development, growth and form. It explored the impact of natural variation, accidents, heredity and hybridisation on the development of a stag's rack.

In relation to hybridisation, I hypothesised that a particular herd in my local area seemed to include animals of a red-Moluccan rusa cross. At the time of writing, I had no absolute proof of the fact, just an inkling supported by a single head. However, thanks to the success of a mate recently taking an 8-point stag from the same herd, I think at long last I have my proof.

To recap

In 2016 my son Joseph and I grassed two 7-point stags from a herd on a mate's property. The first, a typical head, was taken in March. It exhibited all the expected form and growth patterns of a red stag. The second, taken in September, bore antlers in the traditional red deer form but they were miniature. Even

though both animals were bodily of a size consistent with a mature red stag, I could immediately see a conundrum in respect to their antlers.

It transpired that the district had once held a small population of Moluccan rusa deer. I concluded that the smaller rack could be an indication of a red-Moluccan hybrid resultant of a red stag having covered a Moluccan doe – or vice versa – at some point. When I compared the suspected hybrid to a Moluccan rusa head, it confirmed in my mind that the rack had the growth pattern/form of a red stag but the size characteristics of a Moluccan rusa. In fact, the comparative dimensions of the hybrid against the Moluccan indicated an almost perfect correlation. Based on this physical evidence I concluded that in this instance the genetic code of two species had merged to produce a hybrid presentation. I had always wanted additional proof to confirm my belief, and I reckon I got it after that successful hunt with my mate.

A hybrid 8

My regular hunting companion, Dave, and I had decided on one last 'antler quest' for the year. It was late August 2024, and there was plenty of venison in the freezer, so we were on the lookout for something to break Dave's trophy duck. Dave is an accomplished shot and an experienced outdoorsman who I've hunted with for more than a decade. Over that time, he'd had ample opportunity to take a representative head but always declined, mostly due to his ethical 'let em go and let em grow' attitude and the fact that he would often be mentoring my son, allowing him to take the shot. He is indeed a gentleman! Anyway, in this instance we had a specific purpose for our hunt, and I still harboured the ulterior motive of wanting to see if another hybrid stag might be taken on the property.

We hit the ground late afternoon and began our circuit. One of the most productive parts of the property has always been an extensive stand of heavy timber following a ridge line down to a secluded dam.



Red deer antler form but with Moluccan rusa sizing, suspected hybrids.
Dave's 2024 stag (top) and Joseph's 2016 stag (bottom).

We had regularly bumped stags there in the past. The edge of the timber bordered a clear and open ridge face, and I suggested that Dave position himself in ambush along this natural escape route. I began stalking through the timber with the intent of trying to drive any deer toward Dave's position by being a little noisy and deliberately working the wind to push my scent along and across the spine of the ridge. The tactic worked and in response to my obvious presence, first the cattle, and then the deer, began to move away from my position toward Dave. The echoing crack of a single rifle shot seemed to signal success!

Sometime later I found Dave looking very relaxed sitting on a log on the upslope of the clearing. I was perplexed, although he is an excellent shot, I could see no evidence of a grassed deer. I walked up and said in a cocky manner, "well where is the 10-point stag you bagged"? He just smiled and pointed, "up there." Sure enough at the top of the rise under a tree was indeed a stag; an 8-pointer neatly despatched. Dave said that the stag had bolted out of



Seeing is believing!

the timber like a freight train, straight past him at a few metres simply going too fast for a shot. However, at the top of the rise he had done that oft fatal red deer thing and, oblivious to Dave's presence, stopped to look back toward the source of his apprehension – me. Big mistake, Dave had his first representative head on the ground, and I had some additional proof for my hybridisation theory.

Confirmation

As soon as I saw the rack on this animal I was transported back to the morning in 2016 when Joseph had grassed his hybrid 7–pointer. In all respects it could have been the same animal; the proportions and visual impact of the antlers said it all. This stag was a mature beast, bodily typical of the reds on this block; solid and robust yet one look at his antlers was enough to convince me that here again was another red–Moluccan cross. His head gear, like that of the 2016 stag, simply did not correspond to an animal of his obvious maturity. Once again, the growth pattern and form of the rack was all red deer, but the slim, narrow, almost elegant presentation was all Moluccan rusa. I have no doubt that the two animals shared the same genetic inheritance from a common sire in the distant past.

By way of proof, or at least so as others can draw their own conclusions, I have provided photos of stags taken off the property. You will note that all are big bodied mature reds, in that respect they are all similar. However, when you look at their individual head gear it becomes obvious that they are indeed vastly different. Two animals are adorned with antlers which, although atypical in form, are growth wise commensurate with their level of maturity, and two are not. Looking at and comparing the two suspected hybrids, I believe the glaring similarities make a compelling argument in favour of my conclusion. Namely, that a hybrid strain exists in the herd inhabiting this particular property. It just goes to show that everything on the planet is a product of its genetic inheritance, which was exactly the point of my original 2023 article. Don't you just love Mother Nature! ■



A mature 5–point stag taken in August 2024 showing typical red deer features.



The initial 7–pointer taken in March 2016 with typical red deer features.

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Hunt scent-free with Shuma

Don Caswell has the goods to help beat those wary old animals

Most of the animals successfully hunted are under three years of age. One reason for that is the relative abundance of young animals. But that is not the whole story. By the time an animal, be it boar, deer, dog, whatever, reaches 10 years old, it is an incredibly careful campaigner. Animals only reach that age by being consistently wary. The breeding season is a window of opportunity where the males lose some of their

well-honed caution while competing for the ladies. The rest of the year, the old boys are right on top of their game. Every now and then, hunters get lucky, and a worthy old trophy animal will just happen to be in the right place at the wrong time. Then there are those few hunters who consistently outperform on such trophy animals. These hunters have layered experience and knowledge with a well-developed skill set enhanced by patience and perseverance.

That combination is required to counter the acute senses of prey animals. The most highly developed sense in such animals is their sense of smell.

Experienced hunters know that they should not wash their hunting clothes with standard laundry detergent. There are good reasons for this. The chemicals that brighten the colours in clothing have a UV component that humans do not see. Many animals see further into the blue



end of the spectrum than we do too, with blue coloured clothing best avoided in the bush because some dyes have a pronounced UV glow. Having opted for earthy dull colouring in your hunting clothes you still need to be careful in the laundry. The brighteners in laundry detergent can give you a neon-like glow to animals to shine like a beacon. And that lovely lemon-fresh scent can be detected by animals kilometres away. Seriously, kilometres! Another big giveaway is deodorant. It too provides a penetrating odour easily detected by wary animals.

Having lived in rural areas for many years, we had to be careful in our choice of laundry detergent. Relying on septic systems, we needed to opt for the 'earth-friendly' detergents that did not contain the harsh chemicals behind brighteners and scents. More than a decade ago I retired and began getting much more bush time, hunting and photographing. With my clothes washed in earth-friendly detergent I found I could get close to most of the animals I was chasing. However, as

I mentioned at the start, I quickly discovered that the smart old specimens would bolt at the merest whiff of my presence while the younger specimens continued to hang about unconcernedly. I had to develop a super-careful reaction to the prevailing breezes. This was particularly so at the dawn magic hour when the breeze, although slight, would swing around a lot before it settled into a consistent direction after sunrise. I did consider trying the US deer hunting products but was not sure how well they might work under the vastly different Australian conditions.

So, when Shuma offered their products for testing by *Australian Hunter*, I was keen to participate. Shuma is a small start-up Australian company based out of Melbourne, established by a keen hunter who realised the need for something better in washing detergent and personal scent control. Shuma manufactures unscented, UV brightener-free products that are 100 per cent natural and organic. They have laundry detergent, hair and body wash, beard oil and dog shampoo, all unscented.

Scent suppression has been a major aspect of deer hunting in the USA for many years. One driving factor there has been that a lot of US deer hunting takes place at close range in forest, mostly from tree stands. Whatever the underlying reasons, scent suppression has never been adopted to any degree by Australian hunters, yet. My approach to using Shuma is that I first wash everything I will be wearing on a hunt, from floppy hat to socks. I keep this scent-free clothing in a small carry bag that I also previously washed in Shuma detergent. Before and during hunting trips I wash myself with the Shuma body wash and shampoo and do not use deodorant. Save that for the trip home to the family. The results have seen me get closer to animals than ever before, with positive yields.

Shuma's home-grown solution provide the best chance of success on wary prey animals and is another vital tool in the kit of serious hunters seeking old, trophy animals. Shuma's products range from \$24.95 – \$32.95 and are available from various gun stores and **shuma2024.com** ■



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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@inet.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.

Accreditation 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.ssaaqld.org.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 pest animals that impact and 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 and often involve camping out. As well as undertaking pest animal control activities, members are involved in wildlife monitoring, undertake working-bees at key sites and can attend regular range days throughout the year.

For further information or to attend a quarterly meeting or range day, please visit cwmsa.com.au, contact us via email on secretary@cwmsa.com.au or via post to Conservation & Wildlife Management (SA) Inc., C/O Secretary, P.O. Box 188, Kent Town, SA 5071

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 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



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Around the campfire

with John Denman

Here's a subject that has created more discussion among hunters around campfires than just about anything else – using the right bullet for the job at hand. In Victoria you are not allowed to hunt sambar with anything less than a .270 Winchester shooting a 130gr bullet. It's pointless suggesting that any bullet of a given weight will be suitable for taking out a deer the size of a sambar.

A well-constructed bullet in a .270 Winchester will most certainly drop a large deer, provided it's well placed. But there are a lot of 130gr bullets in the .277 calibre, and not all of them are constructed to do the job. There is no doubt that the right bullet out of, say, a .243, will kill one of these deer.

I know of one sambar that was shot successfully with a .22 rimfire. The hunter was out after rabbits, so wasn't carrying a .270. A sambar hind stepped out of the bush right in front of him and he reacted instinctively and shot it. The deer fell. However, this doesn't mean we can all swap our .270s with a .22.

Bullet construction is more important than its weight. If you find a bullet that you can manage a bit more velocity out of, and will penetrate for a clean kill, then you should use it. In Australia most of the game we hunt is relatively light-skinned. Even pigs will go down easily if the right bullet is used.

An example is the ever popular 6.5 Creedmoor. This cartridge made its name in long-range target shooting, and for that you need a heavy calibre bullet. In the case

of the 6.5, it's usually a 140gr weight or even heavier. But when the same cartridge is used for hunting, you don't really need that heavier bullet.

I have two Creedmoor rifles – one is a lightweight hunting rifle and the other is a heavy target rifle. The hunting rifle shoots 123gr bullets extremely well, and my choice here is a Hornady 123gr SST. I also like the 130gr Nosler AccuBond. Both bullets are accurate and penetrate well. They will also do it with lower terminal velocity. So, here's the rub – the more velocity you subject a bullet to, the better chance there is of it not penetrating far enough before it disintegrates. This is because not all bullets will perform the way you want them to if you only select a bullet by calibre.

There are bullets designed to hold together under higher velocity. Most cartridges in the 6.5 calibre leave the barrel at less than 3000fps. So if you use that same bullet in something like the 26 Nosler, there's bound to be a different outcome. A bullet designed to penetrate at lower velocity may well fragment prematurely if driven at a speed it's not constructed for.

The welfare of the game animal is paramount, not bragging about how far you shot it. But if you own a rifle that sends bullets out at eye-watering speeds, make sure you pick the right bullet. The worshipping of velocity has been waxing and waning, often driven by US hunters who often have little choice when shooting animals like antelopes at longer ranges than most deer are hunted.

Using all that powder capacity to drive a heavier bullet, which has a far better BC, along with far better penetration credentials, is a more efficient use of all that power. Having said that, it's quite common to hear of what the US hunters call 'speed goats' shot at closer ranges that nullify the need for barrel burners.

For most of us though, game is usually hunted at more sensible distances. It's of maximum importance to decide on bullet selection based entirely on what you hunt and where you hunt it. Anyone not sure about the right bullet selection should consult Nathan Foster's writings on terminal ballistics. Nathan really knows his stuff and is widely quoted globally, not just in his native New Zealand.

Today, there is a bewildering choice when it comes to both factory and handloaded ammo. The standby for many years has been Nosler's excellent Partition bullet. There are also some great solid or monometallic bullets, like those made by Barnes. Again, not cheap, but highly effective.

I once shot a water buffalo with a .308 using a 165gr Barnes. I found the bullet under the skin on the far side of the buff. It was perfectly mushroomed. That's penetration, but had I used the same bullet on a deer, it would have gone right through.

Good quality hunting bullets are not always expensive, but bear in mind most hunting should only require one well-placed shot. Sometimes the extra expense can be justified. ■

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We've collaborated with government and environmental organisations to protect wildlife in Australia. The SSAA and its state chapters have spearheaded conservation initiatives such as establishing a koala habitat in Queensland, reintroducing the western quoll, protecting the yellow-footed rock-wallaby and conducting stubble quail population surveys in South Australia. Our efforts also include deer research, raising awareness and facilitating the removal of pest animals such as wild pigs, feral cats and foxes.

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Not Covered.

Theft where the equipment was not stored in an approved gun safe as required by State or Territory authority, other than when the equipment is in use or away from the member's premises. Where the member or any person or entity to whom the equipment has been entrusted to fails to comply with any law relating to storage, use or handling of the equipment.

Any commentary provided in the advertisement is general information which does not take into account your individual situation and you should consider SSAA Mutual's Financial Services Guide and Statement of Protection, PDS and TMD (www.ssaib.com.au) before deciding to become a member and to purchase and hold discretionary protection issued by SSAA Mutual Limited. ACN 655 675 862