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FROM THE HIP

There's a certain pleasure in hunting with a nice old gun, especially a side-by-side 12-gauge. Former editor Marcus O'Dean didn't have to pay a lot for his Aramberri, which has well and truly paid for itself in enjoyment. In his fox-hunting yarn on page 58 he recounts how it turned out to be a pretty good thing for quick shots from the hip, too!

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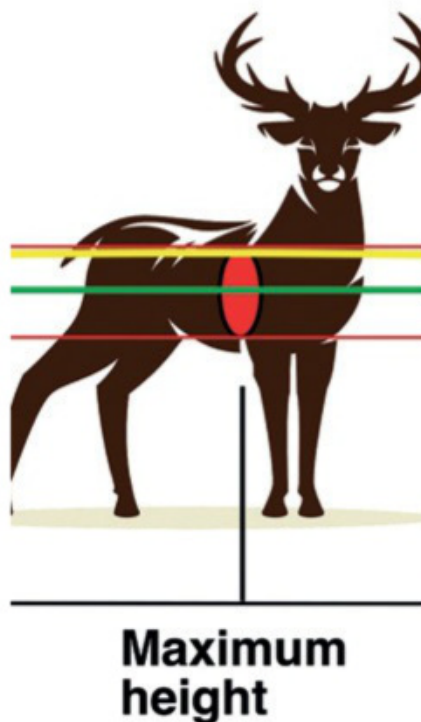
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ON THE COVER

A confrontational scrub bull photographed by Mick Matheson.






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No-bull bullets

If there's one thing Mick likes, it's good bullet performance.



ONE of the most satisfying things after a good hunt is retrieving a bullet that has done its job perfectly. One of the worst is firing a shot and knowing your bullet hasn't.

I had 93 soft-point .223 rounds in the ammo box for a few years, sitting there in disgrace because the seven I fired didn't do what they were meant to. I bought them for roo culling. Not having to take head shots like pros in some circumstances, I went for my preferred shot to the chest — a bigger target with a sure chance of death.

But these rounds went straight through like a full-jacketed military round. They were way too hard, not opening up on such light animals. All seven roos died but most hopped a long way before dropping dead. The neat little hole made by the projectiles transferred very little energy and did minimal

damage. They were useless for the purpose.

They were perfect for a bit of practice and brilliant on pigs, though. The extra muscle density and bone in the small- and medium-sized pigs around here gave those soft-points the resistance they needed to properly expand.

Experience told me other soft points would be softer than those ones, but I bought a few boxes of plastic-tipped rounds before I went back out after roos. They did devastating damage.

Another time a 174gn 7mm projectile didn't perform as it should have but it worked out very well. I shot a fallow buck from only 30 metres, so the bullet was still going very fast — faster than the impact speed for which its maker designed it. I didn't mean to encounter this deer up close. I was more used to 100-200m shots in the place I was

hunting, but how often does a hunt go to plan?

Anyway, the projectile pretty much disintegrated after penetrating the hide and hitting a rib. There were little bits of copper and lead spread right through the chest cavity, which was a mess. Not one bit of copper had any lead attached to it. There was no exit wound. The buck dropped dead on the spot, so you can't argue with that.

The scrub bull I shot recently (see page 50) died partly as a result of excellent bullet performance. The first shot went through the upper leg bone and turned it to mash before entering the chest, travelling through lung and heart, and finally coming to a stop against the gut without breaking through into the stinky stuff.

Despite all that bone to break through, the projectile retained half its weight and had a neatly domed top with a

ABOVE: Penetration, expansion and weight retention: these two bullets worked really well on the scrub bull.

few slivers of peeled-back copper hanging from the sides.

The second shot was your classic side-on chest shot, entering through a rib, pushing through lungs and heart, then stopping under the far-side skin. It kept 70 percent of its initial weight and looked like something you'd see in the sales brochure.

At seven bucks a shot, you'd want to see that! And that's pretty cheap by big-game standards.

Pay attention to how your ammo works, and not just on paper targets. Projectile performance after impact is the ultimate measure of what's good and what's not.

MICK MATHESON
Editor

SPORTING SHOOTER

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Letters containing questions for answering by Nick Harvey must be accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope. Mail your letters to: **The Technical Editor, 3 Reef Street, Hill End, NSW 2850.**

LETTER OF THE MONTH

The mild little 7mm-08 Remington

QI am looking for a hunting rifle for my wife. She has been using my .243 Winchester Featherweight, but would prefer a lighter rifle chambered for a mild-kicking cartridge that's adequate for deer and pigs. The 7mm-08 seems to qualify but what brand and model lightweight rifle should I get? One that's not too expensive.

— *Toby Richardson*

A You've made a good choice. The mild recoil of the 7mm-08 will allow your wife to put the bullets in the right spot. It's on a par with the 7mm Mauser and its velocity is 300fps short of the various 7mm Magnums, but correct shot placement, not extreme

velocity, kills big game.

The 7mm-08 shoots well with .284 bullets ranging from 120 to 160gn, but I'd recommend your wife sticks with 120 and 130gn bullets, which kick less and are adequate for pigs and deer. For pigs and fallow deer I recommend the Hornady 120gn FTX and the Speer 130gn spitzer, but for larger deer a controlled-expansion bullet like the Barnes 120gn Triple Shock ensures the bullet retains its weight and penetrates without increasing the recoil.

AR2206H and AR2208 provide good bullet speed with those light bullets.

Choosing a suitable economy-class lightweight



rifle is harder. There are not many 7mm-08 rifles listed as being available new at the moment, so second-hand may be the better option. The Winchester XPR with Mossy Oak camo stock or a Howa Ranchland Compact both come to mind, but visit your local gun shop and let your wife heft a few rifles and see which one she likes.

The 7mm-08 (left) faces stiff opposition from the 7mm Mauser, 7mm Ackley, .284 Win, .280 Rem, and .280 Ackley, but acquits itself well.

Weatherby riflescopes

QI just got hold of a very nice secondhand .300 Weatherby Magnum Mark V for a reasonable price. The rifle was made by JP Sauer & Sohn. What year did Roy Weatherby drop Sauer and get Howa to make the Mark V? This rifle has a 2-7x variable power scope also made in Germany. I would like to know who made this scope for Weatherby.

— *Paul Cameron*

A Weatherby finalised plans to have the Mark V made by Howa in Japan in late 1969, but for the first two years he received rifles from both companies to ensure adequate supply.

Your scope was made by Hertel & Reuss and an interesting feature was that it had two top-mounted turrets

and no conventional side-mounted windage turret. In fact, one of the turrets controlled the scope's focus while the other housed two dials for adjusting windage and elevation. The Premier line are very fine scopes, but in the 1960s Roy introduced an entirely new line of Imperial scopes made by the Asia Optical company in Japan, which had second-plane reticles. In 1984 he replaced Premier scopes with the Supreme line, also made by the Asia Optical company.

The El Tigre lever-action

QI was watching a movie about the Spanish Civil War of 1936 to 1939. The hero was using a lever-action rifle. It looked just like a Winchester Model 1892. Did



Correct shot placement, not extreme velocity, kills big game."

Winchester make these guns for General Franco's Nationalist army? Or did they get them from some other source?

— *Jerry Brown*

A The rifle you saw in the movie was an El Tigre, a close copy of the Winchester Model 1892, but it was made by the prolific firm of Garate Anitua y Cia in the great Spanish arms centre at Eibar. It was introduced just after the beginning of World War I and used until the start of World War II, and was made in only one calibre, .44 Largo (.44-40).

A close copy of the Model 1892, El Tigre has a full-length tubular magazine holding 12 rounds, a military-style ladder rear sight graduated to 1000 metres, a saddle ring, case-hardened hammer and lever, and a walnut stock. The receivers carry a tiger logo above "Marca Registrada".

The El Tigre saw use by both sides in the Civil War and later by the Spanish Guardia Civil and other police forces in Mexico and Central and South America. The El Tigre was the forerunner of the almost identical Rossi R92.

HORIZON

SERIES



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Two different lateral movements

Q Gun writers mention ‘wind drift’ and ‘wind deflection’ in their articles. Can you tell me what the difference is?

— Jamie Ross

A Lateral projectile movement due to crosswind is more accurately called wind deflection. To ballisticians, the term ‘drift’ refers to the lateral or vertical movement caused by effects related to the spin of the bullet. For smallarms projectiles fired at normal hunting or target ranges, these spin-induced effects are marginal and can safely be ignored.

.30-30 Winchester accuracy

Q What kind of accuracy can I expect from my Marlin 336 in .30-30 Winchester topped with a Leupold 2-7x scope? Could you recommend a handload with the Hornady 160gn FTX bullet? Can you suggest a distance to sight-in at?

— Steve Neagle

A Over the years I have tested a dozen or more Marlin 336 rifles in .30-30 and a good many of them grouped into 2 MOA at 100yd when fed

ammo that agreed with them. A charge of 30gn of AR2219 drives the 160gn FTX bullet at 2300fps from a 20” barrel. This load shot quite a number of 1½” groups at 100yd. If you sight in the 160gn FTX to be 2.5” high at 100yd it will zero at 180, drop 2” at 200 and 8” at 250. That load was very accurate in all the rifles I tested it in.

The Nikonova AN-94

Q I believe the Russians replaced the AK-74 (which had previously replaced the famous AK-47 for military service in 1974) with a new rifle called the Nikonova AN-94 in 1993. It was said to be an innovative new design chambered for a sub-calibre cartridge, the 5.45x39mm. What can you tell me about the AN-94?

— Rodney Harrison

A The “Automat Nikonova-94” replaced the Kalshnikov-designed AK-47/AKM/AK-74 series rifles. Like its predecessors, it was a selective-fire rifle, capable of full- and semi-automatic fire. The design employs a blow-back shifted pulse (BBSP) system which is recoil and gas operated. It starts out at 1800 rounds per minute and then slows down



Many hunters still believe that the age of a stag is related to the massiveness and the number of points on its antlers.”

to 600 after the first two rounds are fired.

The AN-94 was named for its designer, Gennedy Nikonov.

The adoption of the 5.45x39mm cartridge was probably instigated after the Russians realised the effectiveness of the small-calibre, high-velocity American M16 A1 in 5.56x45mm. The 5.45x39mm has a more slender case and a thicker rim than the 7.62x39mm (M43) cartridge. The spitzer-boattail bullet has a mild steel core, a diameter of 0.221 to 0.222 inches, weighs from 53 to 54 grains and has a muzzle velocity of 2950fps.

The AN-94 has too many innovative features to have the space to describe here.

Marlin Model 1895G Guide Gun

Q I’ve just become the proud owner of a Marlin Model 1895G Guide Gun which seems to have a muzzle brake cut into the barrel. Because .45-calibre jacketed bullets have become so expensive, I bought a Lyman mould #457191 to cast 293gn lead bullets for my gun. Could you suggest a powder and load for this bullet? Also, is it true that the Marlin has MicroGroove rifling which

may not shoot cast bullets too accurately?

— Wayne (Tex) Martin

A The Guide Gun’s handy 18½-inch barrel has a pair of holes arranged on either side of the front sight to vent gas upwards. Upward gas movement reduces muzzle jump and perceived recoil. Another pair of holes on each side of the barrel below the front sight vents gas out to the side, further reducing felt recoil. Fast recovery makes follow-up shots easier.

Many shooters use cast lead bullets in their Marlin 1895Gs and past experience has shown that Marlin’s MicroGroove rifling gives accuracy problems with these bullets. Happily, your rifle has six-groove Ballard-type cut rifling with a 1:20 twist. A good load with the 293gn cast bullet is 50gn of AR2207 for 2080fps.

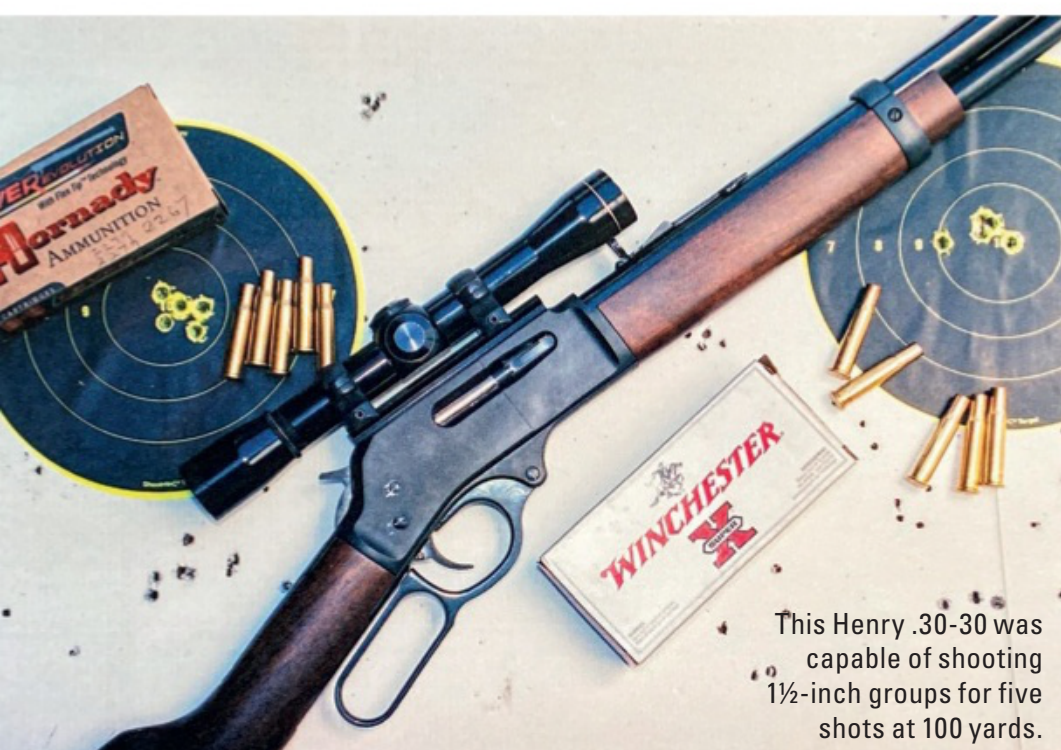
Greek service rifle

Q Arms references list the Greek Mannlicher-Schoenauer service rifle as Model 1903 or 1903-14. Which designation is correct? What was the calibre? Ballistics? Who was Schoenauer?

— Bruce Dean

A Both designations are correct. The 1903-14 has a longer handguard than the 1903 and a stacking rod at the upper band. Otherwise, the weapons are identical. The calibre was 6.5mm (.256 Greek). The rimless cartridge had a length of 3.05”. The round-nose bullet weighed an average 159.3gn and muzzle velocity was 2220fps. Chamber pressure was a mild 44,000psi.

Otto Schoenauer was a director of the Steyr Arms Co and developed the rotary magazine of the Mannlicher-Schoenauer. The bolt and receiver of this firearm were designed by prolific Austrian arms inventor Ferdinand Ritter von Mannlicher.



This Henry .30-30 was capable of shooting 1½-inch groups for five shots at 100 yards.

1775

RIGBY

[illegible]



“

No way would I consider converting an Amberg 1916 Mauser to .300 Win Mag or any other hot magnum cartridge.”

Amberg Mauser action

Q I have acquired a Mauser 98 action marked “Amberg 98, 1916” that looks to be in good condition despite its age. I would like use it for building a .30-06 or .300 Winchester Magnum rifle. Would it be strong enough?
— Joel Atkins

A That “Amberg 1916” is far from being the best Mauser action. It was made during World War I. No way would I consider converting it to .300 Win Mag or any other hot magnum cartridge. I’d feel entirely safe with it in a .30-06.

Older doesn’t always mean bigger

Q Is it true that all the oldest stags have heavy antlers with a lot of points? Hunting articles often mention “big old trophy bearers”. Is this merely an expression writers have adopted which doesn’t really mean what it appears to?
— Cyril Curnow

A It seems you’ve caught us gun writers out! Many hunters still believe that the age of a stag is related to the massiveness and the number of points on its antlers. This theory supposes that the older animals have the largest racks.

It has been shown in game ranches and other places, however, that antler size and the number of points correspond to the amount and nutritive quality of the animal’s feed. Stags on a friend’s deer farm have grown 12 points on their second rack.

Making .35 Whelen cases from .30-06 brass

Q I’ve just had my Winchester Model 70 in .30-06 rebarrelled to .35 Whelen for sambar hunting. I haven’t been able to obtain any unprimed brass for the .35 Whelen, but I have 200 once-fired .30-06 cases on hand. Can I simply neck them up to .35?
— Arthur Reynolds

— Arthur Reynolds

LEFT: With the Chrony chronograph set up four metres from the muzzle, velocity loss would be a mere 12fps less than the initial velocity at the muzzle.

A Easy, old buddy! I used Winchester .30-06 cases that were expanded and loaded in Simplex dies, which worked perfectly. The tapered expander plug was also made by Simplex and enlarges the neck to about .360”, after which the case is run through the neck resizing die, sizing the necks to hold the bullets friction-tight without crimp.

Case necks were dipped in Imperial dry neck lube and fire-formed in the rifle and gave not the slightest trouble with feeding or extraction, nor indications of too high pressure.

Muzzle velocity

Q I have been measuring bullet velocities with a Chrony chronograph. I am told that the result is the instrumental velocity of the bullet at a point between the muzzle and the Chrony which is positioned 12 feet from the muzzle when using my .300 Remington Ultra Mag. How do I convert this figure to velocity at the muzzle?
— Theo Taylor

A Why would you bother? If the screen of your Chrony is reasonably close to the muzzle you can expect to lose 1fps for each foot of range. Therefore, if the Chrony is situated 12 feet from the muzzle, you would be losing 12fps. Your reloads will vary more than this from shot to shot. So why waste your time? To quote the bard: it’s “much ado about nothing”.

Headspacing .30-06 AI

Q I am an amateur gunsmith who has rebarrelled a number of rifles for myself and my mates. Just now I have a mate’s .30-06

which he wants rechambered to .30-06 Ackley Improved. Can you tell me how to headspace the Ackley .30-06?
— Walter Stewart

A Once a rifle has been chambered for the .30-06 Ackley cartridge it is very difficult to check headspace since there are no gauges available. However, I can say that if the bolt closes with some difficulty on unfired .30-06 cartridges, the headspace is acceptable. If the bolt closes easily on an unfired .30-06 cartridge, then I would suspect headspace is too long.

As you are experienced to some degree, I suggest you finish rechambering by hand-turning the reamer in small increments, frequently checking how the bolt closes on a .30-06 round.

Wants to shoot a Dutch Mannlicher

Q I would like some information about the Dutch Mannlicher 6.5x53mm rimmed. Is there any source of ammunition for it? Can it be converted to a standard 6.5 calibre? I’ve been told that cases can be made from .303 brass. Is this true? What were the original ballistics?
— Henry Hall

A The design of the Dutch Rifle may be a bit crude and impractical but it is a strong, safe gun. I see no reason why you shouldn’t use it if you like it.

You cannot get ammunition but cases can be made from reformed .303 British brass. I bet the guy who told you this didn’t tell you how much work is involved. Turn the rim to .525” and back chamfer. Thin rim to 0.49” if necessary for chambering. Trim to 2.1” and ream neck. Anneal and full-length size.

The 6.5R Dutch originally had a 159gn bullet leaving the muzzle at 2400fps. 



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Palms and points

Tony Pizzata's painstaking efforts prove thorough scouting and cool patience are a deer hunter's best tactics.

I had been watching the fallow for some months in my general area and was amazed at the antler growth I was seeing during late 2021 and the beginning of 2022. I was also seeing better numbers and a lot more mature animals. Why?





A buck gathers his harem. He's a good one but there's still more potential.
INSET: Tony with his black fallow trophy.





WELL, first, we'd received more rainfall — in fact, constant rain for several months — resulting in better feed than I'd seen in many years. Second, two seasons of COVID lockdown meant many hunters didn't have the opportunity to pursue game, as most were in lockdown here in NSW for months on end.

That said, the fallow deer in my area had cracked velvet by the end of the first week of February and the fallow rut came not long after in early April. During those months, I tend to get the fever. Not COVID fever, but the same one most other deer hunters get, where everything else comes second and you find yourself wanting to sneak away from work and family in an effort to control it when the rut comes around.

I'd taken a couple of weeks' leave and decided to chase the fallow for as long as my legs could stand. Yes, the years have started to catch up

“

I'd taken a couple of weeks' leave and decided to chase the fallow for as long as my legs could stand.”

with me; I'm due for a double knee replacement, the result of many years of hard, high-country hunting and road running. But thankfully, the fever and urge to hunt were still as strong as ever, so I continued on.

I spent the first few days scouting as many valleys, guts and gullies as I could for any sign of rubs and scrapes. By the end of the week I'd seen and photographed several nice bucks and had passed up a couple of shooters.

I had plenty of time up my sleeve and, knowing the rut was just around the corner, I figured I'd

probably see new bucks when it all finally started.

Towards the end of that first week, I heard the occasional half-hearted grunt from within the bush edge, so I knew the rut was nearing. That evening, a good friend from Victoria phoned to see how I was faring. He got excited after I told him I'd seen plenty of animals about and a few promising bucks this early in the rut.

I invited him up for the weekend to have a look for himself.

Dave has that same fever I get at this time of year and didn't need too much convincing. He packed



his rifle and was up a day later for the weekend. In no time we were both out scouting for fallow.

After seeing a few deer and no shooter bucks for the afternoon, Dave took a couple of young fallow does for meat. Field dressing and removing as much meat as we could, we prepared for the carry out. That's when I heard that half-earnest grunt again from within the opposite bush edge. The true rut was getting closer by the day, but this buck wasn't going to show.

"I'll bring the rattlers tomorrow," I thought silently.

The following morning we were

out before sunrise but, despite a lengthy walk, we saw nothing, probably due to the windy conditions. That afternoon I asked David if he'd mind us giving the antlers a rattle where we'd heard the buck the previous evening. He agreed.

After a quick glass of the surrounding terrain, Dave and I moved into the area. With a good field of view overlooking a few open pockets in the scrubby gully, I gave the antlers a rattle. Shortly after, a pair of foxes emerged but no buck.

A couple more rattles and some raking on the ground and all went



still. Moments later a doe showed up, making her way down a semi-open face. My mind was urging a buck to follow but nothing eventuated. She slowly grazed her way into the entangled scrub. Movement caught my eye to her right.

I could only see four legs below the scrub line and a partial body outline. It was a buck's mature shape.

"Get ready," I whispered to Dave. "He's a buck, but I can't see his head gear."

Dave was already onto him and took careful aim as the buck emerged from the scrub.

"He's a shooter," I whispered. Instantly, Dave squeezed the trigger. The buck collapsed on the spot. I was probably more excited for Dave than he was.

To this day I don't know if it was the rattling that brought out the buck or just sheer luck. I'd rarely seen a buck leave his female to chase a pair of fighting bucks, but who's arguing that?

Although not a record breaker, the buck was a mature animal, probably past his prime, and a lovely trophy with plenty of length and character. After lots of photos

ON THIS SPREAD

1 Tony passed up this immature buck.

2 Tony's mate Dave joined in and claimed a nice black fallow trophy of his own.

3 With this many bucks competing in the rut, the rub trees cop a hiding.



A young buck tries it on with a couple of does that don't appear very impressed.

“

It had a massive, fully formed palm on one side and a huge pair of bladed daggers on the other.”

we caped the buck and headed for home.

Dave left the next day, giving me a final week to chase the fallow for myself. Monday morning dawned cold and overcast with more rain on the radar. This time I'd be hunting a different property and hopefully the cold snap would get the bucks vocal. Sure enough, sitting at the front gate in the darkness, I could hear a few bucks croaking in the hills above.

Driving in at first light I spotted a nice black fallow with his harem, dashing for cover. A quick look revealed nice palms and points but he'd heard the vehicle and wasn't taking any chances.

A little further on I left the vehicle, donned my pack and rifle and headed for the action.

Throughout the first day I spotted several younger bucks but not what I was looking for. This included a huge menil malform that I regret not taking. It had a massive, fully formed palm on one side and a huge pair of bladed daggers on the other. He was probably better than 30 inches in length. However, I did take the time to film and photograph him and a few other promising bucks.

Day two I decided to leave the vehicle at the front gate, as I'd seen far too many animals the previous morning on the drive in and wanted to investigate what I was no doubt missing. I walked up into cover and followed the bush edge right through to where I'd normally leave the vehicle, which was about two kilometres from the front gate. I reached a high vantage point well above the track.

I knew at this time of morning the deer would still be out feeding below me and would eventually feed their way up into the scrubby gullies. So with the wind in my favour and the thermals slowly rising uphill, I carefully nudged forward, glassing at regular intervals for any sign of movement.

Sure enough, it didn't take long to start seeing wildlife. There were small numbers of deer scattered in almost every gully I crossed, slowly

feeding their way up towards the safety of the bush. However, it wasn't until I approached the final contour that I spied the main mob of does, also feeding up from the open flats below.

The mob consisted of some 15 does and an immature buck so, a bit disappointed, I sat and waited for a few minutes before heading back to the vehicle, just in case I'd missed something. Ten minutes passed and I'd looked over every animal below me several times to ensure there wasn't a shooter buck among them.

As I contemplated getting up, a buck materialised from seemingly nowhere, walking directly towards me, 300 metres away.

He'd been feeding in a patch of high bracken fern that gave him cover and had stepped out to round up his girls and head for the safety of the bush above.

Halfway up the hill between me and the feeding does, he stopped and looked in my direction.

I was in cover with the wind in my favour, so I knew he hadn't spotted me nor smelt me. But I'm sure he had a seventh sense as he froze and gazed in my direction. The stand-off lasted several minutes and I don't know if he was just being cautious or had indeed sensed me.

Eventually the buck turned and headed downhill towards the does, which gave me time to prepare for the shot. Moments later, with the crosshairs on his shoulder, I called "stop" and he ground to a halt. The buck froze and gazed in my direction. The 162 grain Hornady Interlock connected and dropped him where he stood. He lay motionless at about 270 metres.

The rest of the deer had gone. I hadn't even seen them depart as my eyes and mind were on the fallen buck. Gathering my pack and all my gear, I made my way down to the black-bodied buck and, after taking lots of photos, I caped him out and went back for the vehicle.

The following day my son Mick took a few days' leave to hunt with me, as he too had the fever, but that's another story. 

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Beyond the Horizon

The Franchi Horizon Varmint is a semi-custom long-range rifle which offers a number of unique innovations, including a high Monte-Carlo stock which has a removable comb and pistol grip

FRANCHI is world renowned as the maker of sporty, performance-oriented shotguns, but in 2018 the Italian company introduced its first centrefire rifle. Called the Horizon, it was intended to compete with entry-level home-grown models in the economy rifle segment in the US but it has also garnered a lot of attention here in Australia.

“

A combined weight of 4.8kg for rifle and scope softens recoil enough to make the rifle mild to shoot.”

I reviewed the Horizon sporter in 2018, choosing the .308 version, and was impressed by its fine accuracy as well as its practicality.

Now Franchi's Horizon is being offered in two new configurations: the Varmint, chambered in .308 Win; and

Varmint Elite, chambered in .223 Rem and .22-250 Rem. My sample Horizon Varmint, the standard version, has a matte black barrel and receiver with matching black stock. The Horizon Elite rifles come with a Cerakoted barrelled action in midnight bronze fitted to a camouflaged stock.

Normally I don't start a review by concentrating on the stock, but I'm going to make an exception. Designed specifically for varmint sniping, the rifle's Evolved Egonom-X synthetic stock has a most unusual feature, a removable cheekpiece. The comb is made higher than normal to align the eye with a high-mounted scope, which makes it impossible to insert or withdraw the bolt without first removing the cheekpiece. It is removed by pushing forward on the cheekpiece and lifting up the rear end first. It is replaced by inserting the front end and then pressing down on the rear end.

While the stock is synthetic, it has a number of praiseworthy features, including a broad beavertail forend with a flat bottom that allows the rifle to sit steady and be easy to shoot from a rest. The upper section of the forend has a roomy channel for your fingers. The lower section is flared, artistically



blending ergonomic contact points with the linear lines and curving contours on the stock's forend.

The pistol grip, like the cheekpiece, is removable. The reason for his eludes me, but it is slid over a frame and secured in place by the rear action screw. The wrist flares toward the base, and for me it naturally allows a consistent hand position regardless of whether I'm shooting prone, off a rest, or from the sit. Its

angle places my trigger finger within easy reach of the trigger, affording a comfortable grasp. The moulded chequering pattern is basically cubic texturing — a kind of grid pattern, but it is rough enough to prevent the shooter's hands from slipping.

Franchi paid particular attention to the buttstock, providing it with a TSA (Twin Shock Absorber) recoil pad. However, unlike the original TSA pad that featured a gel

material, the TSA pad on the Horizon is effective for its shape and carefully balanced amount of rubber throughout. The pad is noticeably thicker where the recoil energy sharply impinges on the shoulder. Franchi claims these recoil pads, which the company uses on its light 12-gauge shotguns with 3.5-inch chambers, reduces recoil by as much as 50 percent. I can't vouch for this, however, since a combined



weight of 4.8kg for rifle and scope softens recoil enough to make the rifle mild to shoot.

The standard length of pull — out of the box — is 355mm, which suited me just fine.

There's a whole lot more to the Horizon's stock than its unique ergonomics. The stock's rigid mid-section has solid bedding points under the receiver, and the forend has moulded-in reinforcing cross-members beefed up by a longitudinal stabilising rib along the bottom. The stock has two sling swivel attachment points in forend and butt, and both are recessed.

Like most other economy-class rifles, the Franchi is based on the familiar round, double-bridge cylindrical receiver, which starts out as a simple length of chrome-moly barstock and is machined with speed and precision on automatic CNC machinery. It is turned and faced, then drilled and has a notch cut for the base of the bolt handle, a generous ejection port, magazine opening, trigger sear, bolt release catch and a streamlined tang.

FRANCHI HORIZON VARMINT ACCURACY & VELOCITY				
.308 Win, 600mm barrel				
Ammunition	Velocity (fps)	100yd Group Size (inches)		
		Smallest	Largest	Average
American Eagle 130gn JHP	2955	0.48	0.78	0.65
S&B 168gn HPBT	2509	0.42	0.86	0.68
S&B Training 150gn SPCE	2820	0.60	0.95	0.78
Hornady 150gn Interlock	2785	0.68	0.96	0.86
Remington 150gn Core-Lokt Tipped	2745	0.76	0.90	0.85
Handloads				
Woodleigh 130gn PPSN, 50gn RE-15	3108	0.42	0.72	0.58
Speer 130gn HP, 46.5gn AR2206H	3033	0.53	0.84	0.66
Notes: Accuracy results are average of three 3-shot groups from an FCX Lead Sled. Velocity figures are 10-shot averages recorded on a MagnetoSpeed chronograph.				



Boring and threading the receiver ring and cutting the cam inclines comes next, followed finally by heat treatment, polishing and Cerakoting to complete the process. Well, almost.

There are two sets of drilled and tapped holes spaced to accept commercial Remington 700 bases, which are always easy to find. The Horizon Varmint supplied for review came with a Picatinny-style rail attached and a pair of Burris 30mm rings. Beretta Australia also included a Steiner Ranger 4-16x56mm scope with a Germanic No.4 illuminated reticle.

The cold hammer-forged steel barrel has a length of 600mm and the diameter at the receiver ring is 27.15mm. This diameter is carried forward for a distance of 43mm before it begins to taper off, reaching

22.35mm at the 5/8x24 threaded muzzle. The Franchi is fitted with a screw-on muzzle brake. I promptly removed the brake, replacing it with the threaded cap.

The free-floating barrel has four deep grooves commencing 195mm in front of the receiver ring and extending to within 130mm of the muzzle.

The Franchi's round action doesn't have a conventional recoil lug. Instead, the bottom of the receiver ring has a slot milled into it on either side to fit into a V-block embedded into the stock — one slot on either side of the threaded hole that accepts the front action screw. This cradle-like insert in the stock therefore acts as a recoil lug. Combined with the heavy three-lugged bolt and the free-floating hammer-forged barrel, this results in fine accuracy from the rifle.

The one-piece, deeply fluted one-diameter bolt is nickel plated and features three locking lugs that minimise bolt lift to 60 degrees. The bell-shaped bolt knob is easy to grasp and manipulate and the bolt glides in the receiver as slick as can be. The recessed bolt face holds a plunger-style ejector and an extractor claw that takes up much of the surface area on one locking lug.

The Franchi Varmint features a detachable box magazine and two are furnished with the rifle — a four-shot and an eight-shot, both made of high-impact polymer. The four-shot is almost flush-fitting, projecting out of the bottom of the stock barely 7mm, so it's not cumbersome or in any way obtrusive. The magazine release is located inside the



ON THIS SPREAD

1 Franchi Varmint mounted with Steiner 4-16x56 scope attached to the Picatinny-style rail using Burris steel rings.

2 Franchi Varmint taken down into its major components.

3 Cylindrical receiver has short, stiff tang, and bolt release on left side. Notches in the front are for the recoil lug.

4 A V-block embedded in the stock has two shoulders that slide into shallow slots milled in the underside of the action to fit the block.



5

ON THIS PAGE

5 For testing, the outfit was cradled in an FCX Lead Sled on a benchrest.

6 Pistol grip is removable. It slips over a frame and is secured by the rear action screw.

7 The receiver is a cylinder with cut-outs for the ejection port, magazine and trigger housing.

“

The one-piece, deeply fluted one-diameter bolt is nickel plated.”

trigger guard, so there's no way you can accidentally bump it and drop the box out on the ground.

Cartridges seat nicely in a single column and are fed into the chamber smoothly and positively. The rifle can be top-loaded by simply dropping a round through the large ejection port to sit on the magazine follower and be fed into the chamber. The Franchi didn't suffer a single feeding malfunction throughout testing.

Finishing off the package is the single-stage Relia trigger, adjustable from 907 grams to 1.81kg (2-4lb) with a side safety. To adjust the trigger, first remove the trigger guard

and loosen a 10mm nut on the front of the housing to reveal a slotted screw. It is turned anti-clockwise to lighten the weight of pull, while clockwise increases the weight of pull.

My test gun's trigger averaged 1.134kg, according to my RCBS trigger pull scale. It was totally inert — crisp and clean with nary a trace of any takeup or overtravel.

The Franchi's two-position safety is located on the side of the tang behind the bolt handle. It's easy to place on fire or safe and allows the bolt

to be manipulated for loading and unloading in the safe position without any bolt release switch to mess with. There are clear red and white position indicator dots on the right side of the stock that are easy to read.

For testing, I mounted the Steiner Ranger 4-16x56 on the Picatinny rail. This is a big scope, very rugged and bright optically, with precise, repeatable adjustments. The scope has a 30mm tube and features a No 4 reticle in the second focal plane with an illuminated red dot in the

centre. Each click on the 4-16x56 Ranger is listed as being 1cm at 100 metres.

Although no literature accompanied the scope, I assume it utilises Steiner's exclusive CAT (Colour Adjusted Transmission) lens coatings, which amplify contrast in the peak human-vision sensitivity range. The optimised contrast effectively separates varmints from weeds or shadow-dappled backgrounds, exposing your target to a clean, accurate shot. The second focal plane reticle makes precise aiming at small targets easy.



6



7



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RIGHT: One-piece bolt is deeply fluted. The recessed bolt face houses a plunger-type ejector and blade extractor.

BELOW: High Monte Carlo-type cheekpiece must be removed before the bolt can be inserted or withdrawn from the action.



“

The Franchi Varmint is a stand-out rifle with its sculptured stock.”

group sizes that averaged well under MOA.

Later, shooting the rifle off sandbags, I left the muzzle brake off since the rifle's heft and stock design combined made the outfit user-friendly for field use. In fact, the rifle proved to be incredibly accurate. All eight loads tested averaged under MOA, and group sizes didn't get any bigger as the barrel warmed up. The point of impact did vary with different bullet types and weights, which is quite normal.

Factory ammo is available everywhere for the ubiquitous .308 Winchester calibre and is inherently very accurate, but fast 130gn loads may be less common than deer loads. It would be an advantage, therefore, to handload your

ammunition to suit the rifle's primary purpose of reaching way out yonder to decimate varmints and predators.

The Franchi Varmint is a stand-out rifle with its sculptured stock, but I'd prefer it in .22-250 rather than .223 or .308. Admittedly, the .223 may be more popular, but it can't match the flatter trajectory of the larger round. The .22-250 drives a 55gn bullet 400fps faster than the .223 — 3680 against 3240fps — making it a lot easier to hit things with.

And this is precisely what the Franchi Horizon Varmint was designed for; reaching out to spatter unwary pest birds and rodents at serious stretch-out distances.

The Franchi's styling and quality of manufacture are superior to many other rifles in its price range, and its weight cancels out felt recoil, making it pleasant to shoot. The design elements in the stock are purely functional, it has an excellent trigger and is eminently affordable. This entry-level rifle more than lives up to its accuracy guarantee and is one that will satisfy the most demanding varmint hunter. 

✓ SPECS

Franchi Horizon Varmint

Manufacturer: Franchi, Italy

Type: Bolt-action repeater

Calibre: .223 Rem, .22-250 Rem, and .308 Win (tested)

Magazine capacity: 4 and 8 rounds

Barrel: Fluted; length 600mm; 1:11" R/H twist

Overall length: 1188mm

Weight: 3.95kg

Stock: Synthetic with removable cheekpiece and pistol grip

Length of pull: 356mm

Finish: Black Cerakoted barrel and receiver with black stock

Sights: None; Picatinny rail attached

Trigger: Franchi Relia, adjustable from 0.9-1.8kg

Safety: 2-position

Price: \$1209 (black); \$1359 (Elite)

Contact: Beretta Australia, www.berettaaustralia.com.au

The rifle comes with an accuracy guarantee that the Varmint will shoot under one MOA for three shots at 100 metres, but unsurprisingly the Varmint performed even better than that with both factory ammunition and handloads.

Of the five factory loads tested, the Varmint proved to be most accurate with Sellier & Bellot's 168gn HPBT, which produced the best group of 0.42" and another of 0.56" for an overall average of 0.68".

We tested the Franchi's accuracy using bullets weighing 150 and 168gn, but were more interested in what the faster 130gn varmint loads would do, both factory and handloads. The results are shown in the table.

At the range Ken Harding set the Franchi Varmint up in his FCX Lead Sled and shot it at 100 yards. The whole operation took five hours, but since it was a cool day barrel heating wasn't a problem. Because it was a heavy-barrelled varmint and thus unlikely to have long strings of shots fired through it, shooting a series of three-shot groups with each ammo type and briefly allowing it to cool between types resulted in



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Simply the best?

Kahles decided the key to thermal success was to keep it very simple. Was that the right call?

GET the basics right and, in theory, you can't go wrong. The most advanced rifle in the world is no good if it isn't accurate, yet the most simple rifle can't be beaten if it puts bullet after bullet into one hole. Is it the same with thermal imagers?

Kahles has bet on it. The high-quality German optics maker has aimed for little more than state-of-the-art image quality in its Helia TI range, although speed of operation is another big plus.

The goal was to make it "as simple as possible," said Kahles' head of product management, Christian Hahn,

who listed the main design criteria as easy handling, secure identification, a lack of "interfering" lights, and "absolute reliability even under extreme conditions".

The Helia TI has only two buttons that do everything. There's also less to be done: the Helia TI does not take photos or videos; it has only three colour palettes to scroll through; the menu is short and relevant.

"We have not forgotten to integrate a photo and video function," says Hahn, "we have eliminated it on purpose."

If you're scared by online anonymity, walk away now,

because the Helia will not help you. If you're serious about quality thermal imaging to maximise your hunting success, the Helia might be your new best friend.

The Helia TI has great image quality and is better than just being simple to use, it's got some cleverly practical design features.

First, let's talk image quality. I have not yet seen a thermal picture quite as good as the Helia's in anything that costs less. In dearer scopes, yes, sure, but not for this price. Kahles has done well on that score. Kahles chose components like sensors, and



“

Its image clarity permitted me to identify a cat at 180m by its movement.”

wrote an algorithm, with image quality top of mind.

Target identification is the big problem when you're using a thermal device. The lowest grade units will show you little more than a heat signal — a blob of light. The thermals worth buying make it easier to know what you're looking at and the Helia made it pretty easy for me.

The good silhouettes it produced allowed me to confidently pick wombats from

pigs at 150m, something that can be almost impossible with other units. Its clarity permitted me to identify a cat at 180m by its movement, when it might well have been a possum.

One thing that's no different with the Kahles is the use of a digital zoom. The lens gives you 2.3x optical magnification as the base, and the digital zoom increases that by 2x and 4x. It'll enlarge the image but it won't increase the resolution.





Still, sometimes that digital magnification is helpful.

The depth of field is very generous in the Helia, so I hardly ever had to muck around with objective-lens focus unless the range changed significantly.

I did not miss having more colour palettes. I generally work with black hot, using red or white hot as a fallback if I can't get the view I need from black hot; that's all Kahles gives you



2

ON THIS SPREAD

1 Thermals find things a regular light won't reveal. This pig was found with the Helia and shot under the torch.

2 Kahles made the Helia to fit ergonomically in your hand with easy-to-reach controls.



The Helia is so quick because Kahles designed it to load menu functions in the background.”

anyway. Not having to flick past other palettes in the menu made working with the Helia quicker. The transition from one colour to the next is instant with the Kahles, too, just by pressing the first button.

That’s one area where the Kahles is fast. Another is switching on. Press the first button for two seconds and it starts up; five seconds later it has a thermal view activated for you. That is excellent.

Waking it from sleep mode is super-fast, too. Just bring the spotter up to your eye and in about 2-3 seconds it’s awake and showing you targets. The Helia includes a tilt sensor and a motion sensor, and it automatically goes into standby mode when you point it down at more than 75 degrees, or if it is stationary for 15 seconds. Movement reactivates it. Clever.

The Helia is so quick because Kahles designed it to load menu functions in the background. Most thermals activate all their software before showing a view and this can take an interminably long time; I’ve had creatures disappear into the bush while waiting for some thermals to either turn on or just wake up from sleep.

Kahles designed the Helia so that when you pick it up, you can’t help but hold it correctly. Even the way the strap supports it plays a role in this. In the dark, it’s easy to feel whether you’ve got it the right way up and whether it’s facing forwards. The square profile prevents it rolling away when you put it down, at least to some degree.

The diopter adjustment is set into a recess that makes it a little hard to adjust but also ensures it isn’t accidentally changed while

LEFT: Simplicity: the Helia has only two buttons along with a very basic menu so it’s easy to use.

BELOW: (Left to right) Black hot, white hot and red, showing wallaroos on a hill at just over 200m. Note that these images are photos of the Helia’s display and they do not match the quality of view your eye will see.

floating around in a pocket or dangling from its lanyard.

Kahles rates battery life at up to eight hours, partly thanks to the automatic standby mode. I never went out for that long at one stretch but comfortably got four hours without a worry. The battery is built in, so you may want to carry a power pack if you are going out all night.

The device is claimed to be strongly built and waterproof to 1m, two things I didn’t put to the test.

Some people won’t like the lack of mounting thread and wi-fi. Without them, you can’t use the Helia remotely.

I think Kahles has made the right call in making the Helia TI so simple and so fast. The editor in me hates it because there’s no camera; as we say, if there’s no pictures there no story! Well, we content makers will just have to shop elsewhere. But when shooting is the priority, clarity and speed are paramount.

It’s easy to appreciate the clarity of the view. However, it wasn’t until I’d experienced the speed and simplicity of the Helia TI that I understood the tangible advantages they bring. Kahles has cut out the nonsense and made a better thermal spotter for it. 

TI 25 vs TI 35

There are two models in the Helia TI range, the TI 35 tested here and smaller TI 25.

The specs are identical except for the lens size, which translates to magnification and field of view. The TI 25 has lower optical magnification at 1.7x compared with the 35’s 2.3x. This gives the TI 35 the advantage in seeing detail: Kahles labels it as being for “reliable identification”.

On the other hand, the 25 has a wider field of view: 26m width at 100m distance compared with 19m at 100. This gives the 25 the advantage in scanning for and finding targets, because its view covers a greater area: it’s for “fast detection,” says Kahles.

In general terms, the wider field of view is better in a spotter unless you’re working in huge, flat paddocks where distant targets are common. In most situations, you’ll find more targets, and do it more quickly, with the wider view.



Helia TI 35 (TI 25)

Lens: 35mm F1.0 (25mm F1.0)

Sensor: 384x288p

Display: 1024x768p

Pixel size: 17um

Sensitivity: <35mK

Optical magnification: 2.3x (1.7x)

Field of view: 19m @ 100m
(26m @ 100m)

Digital magnification: 1x, 2x, 4x

Battery: Built-in Li-Ion, 8 hours life

Dimension: 198 x 68 x 63mm

Weight: 430g

RRP: \$3990 (\$3490)

More info: www.kahles.at





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Ridgeline Rapid Ascent boots

You'll never have to tie laces again with Ridgeline's new lace-up boots.

THESE boots have just about replaced my elastic-sided work boots because they're so quick and easy to get on and off. I know that's not the point because the Ridgeline Rapid Ascent boots are hunting boots, not work boots, but they're just so easy. They have become more than just hunting boots for me and I wear them almost every day for all kinds of reasons.

The convenience of the boots — matched with their comfort — means I put them on for anything more than just pottering around the yard or shed. The Ridgelines go checking on lambs, repairing fences, weeding along the creek, cutting firewood and, of course, hunting.

Their trick is the rapid lacing system, whereby a reel pulls a steel wire tight in a few quick twists. There are no laces to tie. To undo them, twist the reel's knob anti-clockwise and it instantly releases the tension. Boots on, boots off — almost as quick as elastic-sided boots.

And yet the Rapid Ascent boots give you ankle support that elastic ones can't. They're also light, waterproof and come up just above the ankles, the way I like it.

ON THIS PAGE

1 The Rapid Ascent boots are waterproof, tough and appear very durable.



Because I take my boots off several times a day to come and go from the house, I'd probably be quite satisfied if the Rapid Ascents were a one-trick pony with the rapid fastening system. I mean, I've put up with elastic-sided boots for decades.

However, they're a well designed boot overall, ideal in their designated role as hunting footwear.

They're quiet. They don't creak or squeak, and nor do the soles make undue noise considering they're also fairly solid to provide good

protection underfoot. I think it's the flexibility built into the sole that helps here. These soles, which are branded Ridgeline, have more give in them than the harder Vibram soles on Ridgeline's other boots.

The moulded soles are bonded to the body of the boots and come up around the sides to give lots of extra support.

The Rapid Ascents were comfortable as soon as I first put them on, needing no wearing-in. They have a subtly different shape from the Ridgeline Aoraki boots I have,

“

The Rapid Ascents are more comfortable and practical in Australian conditions.”

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feeling a little slimmer and a fraction smaller inside, though the difference wouldn't be quite half a size.

The ATOP lacing system requires a slightly different approach, which you soon accustom yourself to. As they tighten from the top, they don't pull quite as firmly around the ankles, so I'm in the habit of sliding my foot right back in them and using my free hand to push the tongue of the boots flat on the arches of my feet.

Sometimes, after a few steps, I'll give the reel a tweak just to

make sure the boots fit firmly around my feet.

The wires laces are threaded through runners which allow them to slide easily, as well as removing the potential for the wires to wear through anything. The wires will not break, according to Ridgeline, but spares will be available, probably more to keep the worriers happy.

I've done plenty of decent walks in rough country in the Rapid Ascents, clocking up a good 50km of hard going so far with no complaints from my feet and no wear or damage. The Rapid Ascents seem to be strongly built from durable materials.

There are no pressure points or rub zones inside to irritate my feet, and the inner soles have pleasant cushioning. In the generally cool weather so far, the boots have kept my feet pretty warm, and I've had no signs of them being too hot, either.

Throughout these extremely wet times here, my feet have remained dry except when I've been slack and allowed water to enter from the top.

Sometimes going downhill

I can feel my toes touch the end of the boots but it's light contact that doesn't cause me grief, and usually it's because I haven't got the lacing quite firm enough around the base of my ankles. When you're trying on a pair, make sure you've got a little extra toe room compared with what you might normally look for.

I love how light the Ridgelines are, yet the soles haven't suffered any damage from being lightweight. They grip extremely well, too, to the point where I had expected to lose my footing on gravelly slopes but didn't.

The Aoraki boots are a more heavy-duty proposition for hunters who need one but the Rapid Ascents are more

comfortable and practical in Australian conditions. I'll give you an update down the track when I've just about worn out this pair, but at this stage I can certainly recommend them, not least for the terrific and quick ATOP rapid lacing system. 📍



Ridgeline Rapid Ascent

Sizes: US 7-13

Price: \$349.95

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ON THIS PAGE

1 Light, reasonably flexible soles provide excellent grip, and rise high around the edges for greater protection.

2 Wires laces run friction-free through guides

3 Dial it up! To tighten or release the wires laces, simply turn the reel. It's very quick.



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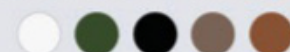
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Stock colour:

White, Green, Black, Mocca, Timber



Magazine colour:

Silver, Black





Participation sport

Hunting's succession plan demands we be hands-on in helping new players participate.



LEFT: Admiring the view down a well-maintained archery range.

functions when everyone puts the work in.

Our club has recruited some new members over the past few months and I'm elated to say many of them are kids. When I watch the joy on their faces as they release arrows at the targets, I'm reminded that the whole thing is supposed to be fun. No amount of arrow tuning or wanting to buy more gear would make a difference to the kids; they just want to get out and shoot!

Any club is the same. We need to embrace their curiosity and thirst for knowledge.

The only way they can get out and shoot, and help the lifestyle grow, is by people like us taking responsibility for it and being



Kids just want to get out and shoot! We need to embrace their curiosity and thirst for knowledge."

IT'S hard to find a balance between effective mentorship and getting to enjoy the time you have for yourself and close friends. If we don't help to inspire people who are coming through the ranks it will be difficult to maintain our strength in numbers in the future.

Saying that, the modern world is forever changing and the desire for instant gratification or satisfaction is hard to overcome for a person starting out in a lifestyle such as ours.

I found myself in a position over the past year that has forced me — in a good way — to put my money where my mouth is. A local archery club has gone through a tough time

with drought, floods, storms destroying infrastructure, and a dwindling membership as a result.

I was vocal at meetings about some things I thought might help the club start to thrive and was nominated as club president soon after. Initially intimidated, both because my archery skills are woeful and because I know nothing about being the president of a club, I decided to give it a red-hot crack.

In some ways it feels like a hell of a lot of work because I'm doing things that I would never bother with normally. Organising people is something I do professionally so when I do it outside work it

wears me out. Looking at it through a different lens reminds me that it's not as much work as it seems, especially when you have so many willing contributors.

At the end of the day, my approach has been to lead from the front as best I can. A lot of the older members need someone more capable to do the physical work and the younger ones coming up need to see that a club only

enthusiastic and dedicated in our club participation.

Whether that be encouraging potential new members to try your gear or getting out and getting your hands dirty when there is work to be done, it all sets a good example for the next generation and shows that maintaining what we have involves a lot of work and dedication.

Until next time, enjoy living your wilderlife.



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Who you gunna call?

The Shooters Union is a national body representing you. Who's behind it?

IF you're a Shooters Union member or following our Facebook page, you're probably aware we spend a lot of time actively fighting for shooters of all types, be it holding politicians to account, alerting members to anti-gun legislation in the works, or just keeping everyone updated with what's going on generally in the shooting world.

What people don't always appreciate is that Shooters Union isn't just an online thing. We're an established national organisation with official, on-the-ground representatives in the majority of states and territories — chiefly Queensland, NSW, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia.

While we were founded in Queensland and our executive is based in Brisbane, we are a national organisation and having people who know the situation and laws in each state is part of why we continue to grow and thrive.

Our Queensland-based members can email us via qld@shootersunion.com.au.

Shooters Union NSW is headed by Craig Golding, a passionate hunter and outdoorsman who works tirelessly to make sure all shooters in the state get a fair go from the Firearms Registry. He has made numerous submissions to government departments on shooting and hunting issues and is currently working to get SU NSW on the Firearms Registry's Advisory Board. You can reach him via email to nsw@shootersunion.com.au.

Shooters Union South Australia's president, Peter Heggie, owns one of Adelaide's largest gunshops, the Gunnery, and has fostered a



Steve is a former police officer as well as a very keen shooter and advocate for firearms owners' rights."

very productive and mutually respectful relationship with South Australia Police (SAPOL). His email is SA@shootersunion.com.au.

In Tasmania, keen hunter Alistair Shephard is our representative and is constantly monitoring the situation there, ready to help shooters in the Apple Isle if needed. He can be contacted via tas@shootersunion.com.au.

Our Northern Territory branch is based in Alice Springs and can be contacted via nt@shootersunion.com.au.

The newest member of the Shooters Union team is Steve Harrison, based in Western Australia. Steve is a former

police officer as well as a very keen shooter and advocate for firearms owners' rights, and brings his knowledge of police systems as well as his organisational and planning skills to the team. He can be reached via WASupport@shootersunion.com.au.

Nationally, occupational users — ie, anyone who uses a firearm for work — are supported by Nathan Ravenscroft, who has been particularly active recently in the field of getting suppressors legalised nationwide on OH&S grounds. He is a wealth of knowledge on the ins and outs of owning firearms for occupational use and can be reached via occupationalshooter@shootersunion.com.au.

For people who really enjoy the classics, we also have a thriving Collector's Branch in Queensland. Its president is Royce Wilson, an extremely knowledgeable firearms historian who has written extensively on a wide range of historic, collectible or otherwise interesting firearms. He can be reached

via collectors@shootersunion.com.au.

Rounding it all out, of course, is that Shooters Union membership is a Genuine Reason in its own right for firearm ownership in Queensland (Categories A, B and H); is an Approved Hunting Organisation in NSW for purposes of obtaining an R Licence; and a supporting reason for firearms licensing in South Australia.

No matter where you are in Australia, Shooters Union membership comes with \$20m worth of public liability insurance when you are participating in organised shooting competitions or hunting on land with the written approval of the landowner — and this includes states with public land hunting, such as NSW and Victoria.

Besides our main website (shootersunion.com.au) one of the best places to see what we are up to is our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/ShootersUnionOfAustralia). It is regularly updated and features everything we're doing — it's a great way to keep in the loop not only with what we're up to but what's happening in the wider shooting community, too.

As you can see, no matter where you are in Australia or what you like to shoot, we are there to support and fight for you. If you're not already a member, why not sign up? It's only \$35 per year and you'll not only get tangible benefits, you'll also be joining a proactive organisation that's got a proven — and growing — track record of kicking goals, getting results and standing up for all shooters. 🇦🇺

Graham Park is the national president of Shooters Union Australia.

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WINNER



The grass has been so long on some parts of Nat Honeysett's place that the pigs disappear into it and can't be found. However, he caught this fat fella ambling along in the open and nailed him with his Vanguard using Fiocchi .223 ammunition. Looks like he'll be adding another Weatherby to the collection now!



"I took Ellie on my annual pig hunt in January, which was her first," says Wayne Gibson. "We pushed through average daily temperatures of 45 degrees. Despite the high temps we had an enjoyable trip, taking multiple pigs. The highlight of the trip was being by Ellie's side when she secured her first pig and goat." That would have been a buzz, Wayne!

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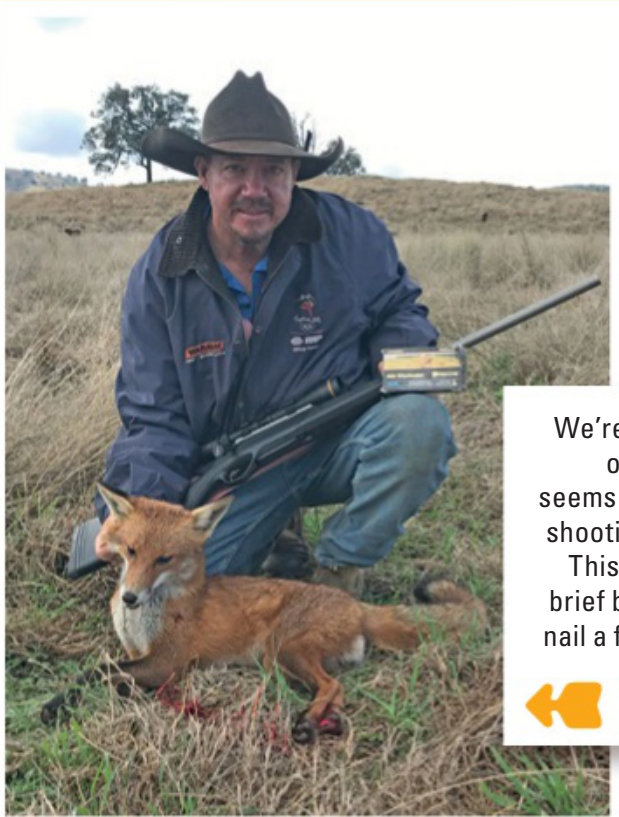
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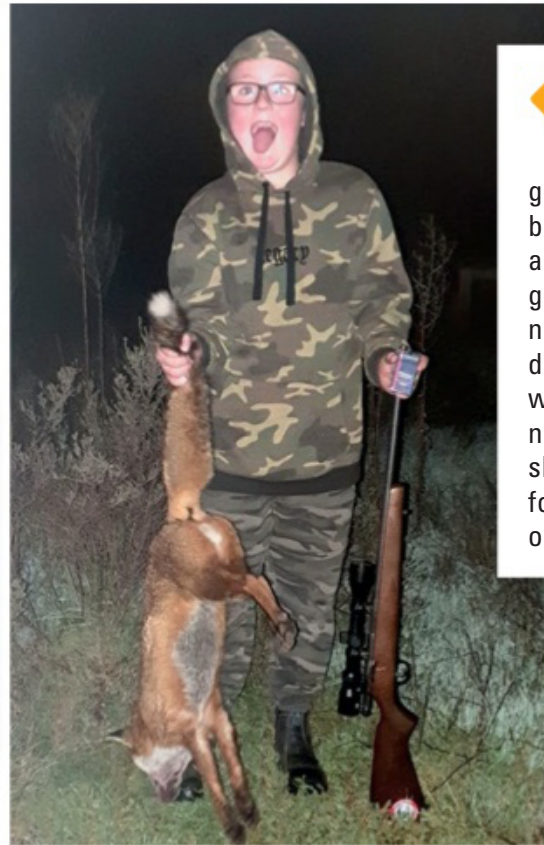
WEATHERBY



FIOCCHI



We're way too envious of John Starr, who seems to have no end of shooting opportunities. This time he's taken a brief break from pigs to nail a fox. Keep sending in the pics, John! We love 'em.



Young Ben Salisbury shot his first fox using Fiocchi high-velocity .22s. "My Nana gave me *Sporting Shooter* for my birthday," he says. "I told everyone about your competition and my Poppa gave me a box of Fiocchi high velocity. I normally shoot subs because my sister doesn't like the loud sound, but she wore earmuffs on the whole trip last night." Ben's dad promised him he could shoot a centrefire after head-shooting a fox with a .22 and it looks like Ben's well on his way as a hunter now!

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PLEASE NOTE: this competition is not a game of chance. To achieve entry, photos must be submitted to the satisfaction of the Sporting Shooter editorial team. All entrants must be over 18 years of age and need to be suitably licensed as per individual state firearm regulations and requirements. The firearms will be issued to winners through licensed firearm dealers upon sighting a permit to purchase. Firearm industry staff, paid shooting publication contributors and staff are not eligible to enter this competition. For full terms and conditions please visit sportingshooter.com.au/wfphotocomp



THREE MONTHLY RUNNERS UP WILL WIN A CAP AND STUBBY HOLDER!





LEFT: Damo with his new rifle and its first kill

The following weekend I was out checking my cameras for deer on the original block again and came across a good-sized sow and a litter of piglets ripping up the only open area on the property — and only about 50 yards from where I shot the first boar!

I stalked towards them and just before I got settled behind a tree, a vagrant breeze gave me away and a couple of the piglets started to run, but luckily the sow stood there sniffing the air for just long enough for me to drop her where she stood. I picked off one of the piglets as they fled into the cover behind them.

I quietly stalked towards their grunting sounds and managed to pop two more in between the trees before the others ran into thicker cover. I collected them and was lining up the four for a photo when I heard the others grunting again over a little ridge to my right, so I sneaked over to see.

They were bunched up among some trees, making their way across the gully floor. I sat on the wet grass and picked off three more from about 60 paces, then winged another, and as I moved up to finish it off I managed to get one more before the lone runt managed to get away into cover too thick to shoot in, and I had one bullet left.

All in all, the new rifle is doing a smashing job of thinning the pig population! 🎯

Blooding the Weatherby

Damo Hart won a Weatherby and has been hammering the local pigs with it.

WHEN I won a Weatherby Vanguard in the Hunter's Gallery competition, I chose .270 Winchester for my calibre and decided to spoil myself with a Swarovski Z6 3-18x50 scope, which has proven to be an excellent combination. I really love the feel of the rifle in my hands; it is very comfortable to handle and shoot, and very accurate.

After several outings without

spotting anything to christen it with, I had a run of luck over a week and a half and managed to bag 10 pigs with it in all.

It started with a young boar which was feeding alone. I was out with two of my hunting buddies as we sussed out the deer action on my favourite block. A simple stalk and a single shot from 100m dropped him so fast I actually thought he got away!

Three days later I went for a stalk at a location where my cameras had been monitoring two boars that were working a wet gully at very inconvenient hours of the night. This time, I caught one out on his own just after dawn. Again, a short stalk and a single shot from around 100m dropped it on the spot.

VORTEX



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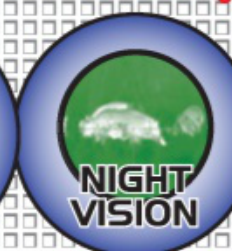
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Point blank range

If you understand point blank range you'll achieve your rifle's true point-and-shoot accuracy at maximum distance



JUDGING by some of the letters to my Ask the Gun Editor column, many shooters just aren't getting the most out of their hunting rifle. A minority are badly handicapping themselves by sighting their rifle for a 100-yard zero. They don't seem to realise just how rapidly even the flattest-shooting cartridge actually drops at hunting ranges.

This was the reason why I included a section listing the all-important PBR — point blank range — data in my Practical Reloading Manual. Since I didn't have enough space to cover every commercial big game cartridge available today, I chose those I considered see the most use.

Even if you are not a handloader or an amateur ballistician, these PBR figures can give you revealing analysis of your pet deer (or pig or predator) cartridge, tell you how to make it more effective, and compare it with competing rounds.

Many a hunter has never given much thought to a sighting-in distance, other than getting the bullet sighted in two inches high at 100yd because this is what he saw recommended in some product catalogue. However, a PBR table will show him that his rifle is incorrectly zeroed if he wants to be able to gain its full performance!

So what? Well, if your rifle is sighted in at any exact

number of yards (100, for example, or 200) there's a good chance it's far from ideal. Hunters often operate in terrain where shots offer at short or very long range — and anywhere in between. In such country it becomes extremely important for the rifle to be zeroed to take advantage of its absolute maximum PBR.

Sure, you can measure the exact distance to game with your laser rangefinder, but you'll still need to judge how much holdover to use, and this is extremely difficult unless your rifle is zeroed to take full advantage of its trajectory.

The line of sight will never coincide exactly with a direct line that would connect the target with the rifle's muzzle. This is due to the fact that all conventional sights are positioned above the rifle's bore. The bullet, although rising steadily to intercept the line of sight as it leaves the muzzle, must necessarily cross the line of sight at some distance ahead of the muzzle.

Because the bullet travels a certain distance toward the target before reaching and crossing the line of sight (this distance depends on the bullet's velocity, the scope's height above the bore, and the distance to which the rifle is sighted in), the apparent mid-range trajectory will be lessened so that the bullet would describe a lower arc over that particular shorter range which represents only the distance from the target to the point where the bullet crosses the line of sight.

The main advantage to be gained from the scope's height above the bore is the apparent flattening of the trajectory, which is an amount equal to half the distance which separates the bore axis from the scope axis. Let's say the average hunting scope's axis is mounted 1½" above the rifle's bore axis and the bullet has a 2" mid-range trajectory rise

ON THIS SPREAD

1 This red stag shot by Ron Wynne in open forest country in Queensland represented a difficult shot at short range. Having his rifle sighted in to maximum PBR helped make this shot possible.

2 A major advantage of the PBR concept is that it allows the hunter to forget about range estimation and concentrate on his sight picture and trigger squeeze.

over the distance for which we are sighted-in, then we will have an apparent maximum bullet rise of 2" minus half of 1½" (ie, ¾") or a total apparent mid-range rise of 1¼". At least this is the theory.

Before you zero your rifle, however, whenever possible you should chronograph the load and get its true velocity. Trajectory figures released by ammunition makers are supposed to be the true figures as measured from the bore-to-target line, but different makers periodically improve the form factor of certain bullets (increasing their ballistic coefficients) and some employ a different bore-to-target line. This means that if you work up a PBR using a computer it is essential that the ballistic coefficient and velocity figures you feed in are absolutely correct.

The definition of PBR is simply the distance to which a specific projectile will neither rise above, nor fall below the target when aimed at its exact centre. For the hunter, the



“It’s extremely important for the rifle to be zeroed to take advantage of its absolute maximum point blank range.”

definition can be modified slightly: The PBR is the distance to which the bullet will neither rise above nor fall below the vital area of a game animal with a centre-of-the-chest hold.

To put it more realistically, the PBR for any given load is the maximum range out to which the hunter can forget about precise range estimation and simply hold in the middle of the animal’s vital chest area.

Let’s say we are using a 26 Nosler shooting the highly

efficient Nosler 142gn ABLR at 3280fps and have laser-ranged the target to be no farther than 370 yards. At this distance I can hold in the centre of the deer’s chest and concentrate on the sight picture and trigger squeeze, confident that the bullet will neither rise nor fall more than four inches from the line-of-sight. It doesn’t matter whether the trophy is 370 or only 50 yards away, for with a centre hold the bullet is going to land in the vital area.

A simple way to explain the point blank range concept is to imagine that the hunter is firing through a tube with eight inches inside diameter, the axis of which coincides with his line of sight. Maximum PBR is 370 yards — the greatest distance to which the bullet will remain inside that imaginary tube.

We’ve been talking only about trajectory — vertical rise and fall — and ignoring the possibility of the bullet’s path

PBR BY THE NUMBERS

I have included a table for the popular .243 Winchester with 100gn bullet showing its performance with four different PBRs. The .243/100gn factory load represents an approximate median in trajectory performance for popular cartridges, so these numbers give an indication of what to expect if you decide to reduce the plus-or-minus allowance of your rifle.

Maximum PBR table for varying target sizes				
.243 Win with 100gn projectile				
Target size (inches)	Highest point (yards)	Height @ 100yd (inches)	Zero range (yards)	Max PBR (yards)
4	160	4.0	276	324
3	136	2.5	240	282
2	121	1.8	208	244
1	103	0.9	164	192

I would not be comfortable with my .243 shooting 4" high and I'd much prefer to rely upon a 3" PBR. At the other end of the spectrum there's a maximum PBR table for the 26 Nosler.

Maximum PBR table						
26 Nosler with 142gn projectile (BC: 0.625)						
Flight time (seconds)	Range (yards)	Velocity (fps)	Energy (ft-lb)	Total drop (inches)	Bullet path (inches)	Wind deflection (inches)
0.17	175	2999	2835	5.27	3.97	1.33
0.31	314	2787	2450	17.77	0.0	4.30
0.37	370	2705	2307	25.21	-4.01	6.09

Zero range is 314yd. Maximum point blank range is 370yd. Wind deflection assumes a 10mph (16km/h) crosswind.

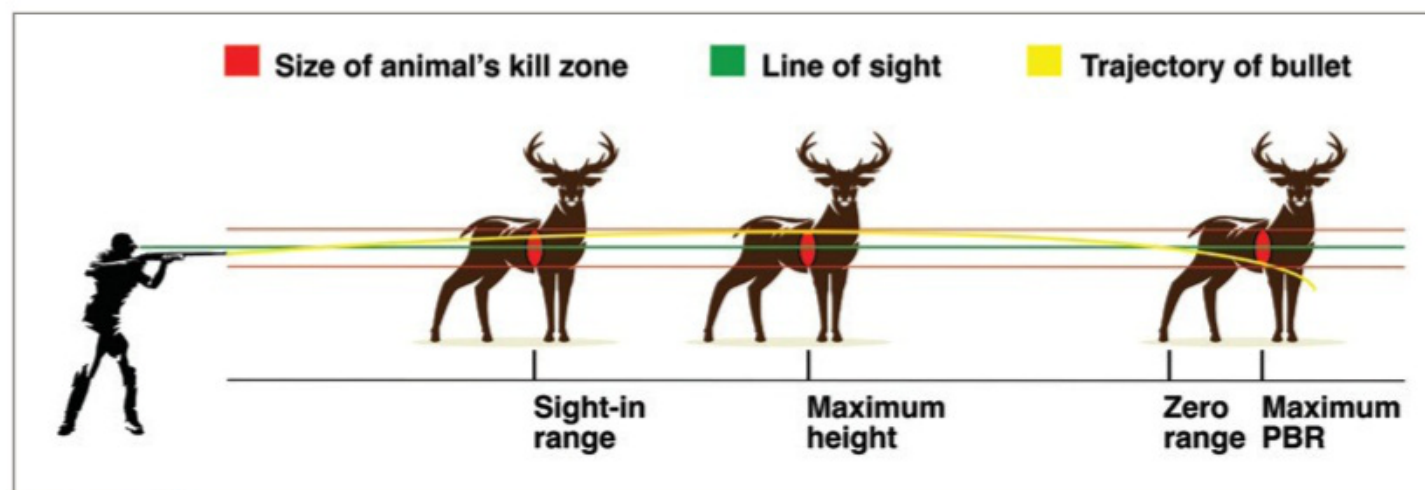
being moved out of the confines of the tube by a crosswind.

Given the fixed trajectory path of any specific loading, only two things can change the PBR itself. One is the size of the target. It should be obvious that the PBR on a mature sambar stag is considerably farther from the muzzle than the PBR would be on a smaller fallow buck. The greater the bullet can rise or drop from line-of-sight with a centre hold, the greater the point blank range, and so the PBR will be longer on an animal with an 18-inch high vital area than on one with only a 10-inch vital area.

Ammunition manufacturers describe the performance of their cartridges in a variety of different ways, publishing ballistic tables that list bullet drop, mid-range trajectory, height, and bullet path. The first two details are not of much use to a hunter because they do not readily translate into 'real' performance characteristics to use in the field. Their value is limited, in fact, even for comparisons between different loads.

Bullet path is, to some

Terrain like this in New Caledonia can produce shots at rusa deer at short or very long range — or anywhere in between. In this kind of country it is extremely important to have your rifle sighted in to take full advantage of its maximum PBR.



“Point blank range is the answer ... because it allows the performance of a hunting rifle to be optimised.”

degree, more useful, because it describes the movement of the projectile relative to the line of sight, but a bullet path assumes a predetermined zero range. This approach has been adopted (using a uniform 200 yard zero) in the ballistic tables in product catalogues and annuals like the Gun Digest.

This is all very well as far as that goes. However, different zeroes produce different bullet paths, and comprehensive ballistic tables either take up a lot of space (as they do in the backs of most reloading manuals) or they must, for purposes of comparison, use the same zero range for all cartridges.

The overriding problem is that a 200-yard zero range can be appropriate only for a few cartridges and loads: it offers no better than a distorted description of the behaviour of all the other cartridges on the list, the ones that should properly be sighted in for longer or shorter ranges.

Point blank range is the answer to this problem. If instead manufacturers had been publishing PBR data for all their loads, hunters would have become familiar with the concept and profited by it

because it allows the performance of a hunting rifle to be optimised. It does away with the need for trying to work out the amount of holdover or hold-under and enables the hunter to make vital hits out to the longest practical distance for any given ammunition and different size game animals.

Many of my readers may question a mid-range trajectory height of up to four inches when shooting game out to a maximum of, say, 400 yards. But such a trajectory height is essential in bringing out the long-range capabilities of 'flat-shooting' magnum cartridges. When the 142gn ABLR in the 26 Nosler is sighted in for a 314yd zero, the bullet is 3" high at 100, just under 4" at 150 and 200yd, drops 2.34" at 350, 4" at the PBR of 370yd and just 6.69" at 400. The drop at 500yd, where velocity has dropped off to 2520fps, is 19" and the remaining energy is 2002ft-lb — adequate for sambar-size game.

When loads such as the 26 Nosler are sighted-in to a lower height of 2" at 100yd, their restricted ranging would not justify their increased noise, cost, recoil and barrel wear.

Any reasonably experienced hunter/rifleman should be able to handle a 4" mid-range rise, in order to take advantage of one of the new high-velocity super magnums. If this is the case, and he already has such a rig in his possession, then definitely he should sight in for the maximum PBR to take advantage of its greatly flattened trajectory.

The maximum PBR of most popular cartridges based on an 8" target is great enough that most hunters shouldn't risk firing at unwounded game at distances beyond it. From a practical standpoint, this concept eliminates all range estimation except the question of whether the target is or is not within the PBR. It does away with any need for holdover or hold-under.

This frees the hunter's mind to concentrate solely on his sight picture and trigger control. If the trophy is beyond the point blank range of his rifle, the hunter tries to stalk closer; if it's within that range, he merely holds on the centre of the vital chest area, regardless of range, tries to hold steady and not jerk the trigger.

Obviously, there can be no all around 'best', since hunting conditions, terrain and calibre preferences differ widely enough to vary the equation. But there is one thing you can be sure of: a 300yd zero in no way handicaps a rifleman on a 100yd shot, but a 100yd zero is entirely useless when a 300yd shot at a once-in-a-lifetime trophy animal crops up. ☒



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Normanby scrubbers

The lure of scrub bulls took Mick Matheson to the Cape and a new hunting outfit with access to fresh country.

Blake steered the buggy around a huge tree. “It’s the only mango tree on the place,” he said and I wished they were in season. I started telling Blake about my sister-in-law’s efforts to grow a mango tree in the NSW Hunter Valley, where a mango tree shouldn’t grow.

“**EVERY** winter she’d cover it and eventually one tiny, shrivelled mang...”

“Pigs!” Blake exclaimed, jamming on the brakes. Three fat porkers were crossing the track in front, heading for the river. I raised my rifle and went to twist into a shooting position but was locked in firmly by the bloody seatbelt that I hadn’t undone. My magazine was in my pocket which I couldn’t reach because of the belt.

The pigs disappeared into the undergrowth. I swore. Blake laughed.

“I’d better get my act together,” I suggested sheepishly.

To make it worse, those were the

first pigs I’d seen. We’d focused mainly on scrub bulls during my first few days on Battle Camp Station, an hour out of Cooktown on the Normanby River. Near camp, there was plenty of bull action and not many pigs for some reason. This was our exploratory trip to the other end of the 17km of river frontage.

By now I had my bull, the main reason for coming all the way up into tropical paradise from the sleeting misery of the NSW Central West in winter. I’d been a bit fussy, passing a number of bulls while we scouted and explored. I’d also blown a couple of chances when I did want to pull the trigger.



Success! Mick scored
an attractive black-and-
white trophy bull.



SCRUB BULL HUNTING



“

I found myself staring face to face with a sharp-horned scrub bull behind the biggest tree in the darkest shadow.”

I could have had a beauty on the first afternoon. Link, one of Blake's two dogs, led us along the Normanby's overgrown, sandy banks into the breeze as we followed pig and bull sign. He showed interest in something at one point but it seemed to come to nothing. We went a bit further then turned back to camp, hugging the water's edge and casting a line every now and then for barramundi.

Suddenly Link was onto something, right near where he'd been sniffing earlier. We stalked slowly, peering into the dark shadows. My mind said pigs but as I looked low a movement higher up caught my eye and I found myself staring face to face with a sharp-horned scrub bull behind the biggest tree in the darkest shadow there was. Smart bugger.

In the moment I wasted wondering whether he was a shooter, the scrubber turned and crashed away through the bush.





“That was a good bull,” Blake said with a grin.

It was great watching the dog work. He stayed close to Blake, sniffing the air, indicating potential targets. When he did, it was up to the hunter and guide to do the rest.

“If we put up a pig that runs away, I can send the dog out to bail it,” Blake said. “When we get in close enough I can call him off and you can shoot.”

In this thick country, that would be a good option. Still, it didn’t work for bulls and my search continued.

I got onto a huge fella next day, stalking in very close but having so much fun with the camera that I didn’t bother with the rifle. He

never knew I was there despite me mooing at him a few times so I could get a head-up photo of him.

We had a few more encounters but also spent time exploring more widely on Battle Camp Station, stalking lagoons, sight-seeing in the buggy and enjoying being out. During lunch on the third day Gundolbii, the nephew of the property’s Traditional Owner and part of Blake’s guiding crew, came into camp with news of the best trophy bull of the lot, which he’d spotted a few kays away at Battle Creek. We piled into the Cruiser and headed off.

Crossing the dry creek bed on foot, we closed in on where Gundolbii had seen the bull. Following Gundolbii is an

experience. He moves quietly and easily through the bush, barefoot and comfortable, always apparently knowing exactly where he is no matter how thick and dark the bush is. He loves his fishing and bow hunting.

Slowly, slowly we edged past a clump of rubber vines, looking the other way, to where we expected to see the bull. The sneaky bugger burst out from the far side of the vines and ran off; he’d hidden in there and watched us pass.

Unexpectedly, I began to worry about time passing and developed a sense of urgency about getting a bull on the ground. Unreasonably, I declared that today was the day.

As the sun set, Blake and I were moving along a fence line by the

ON THIS SPREAD

1 Blake shows off a typical Normanby River boar.

2 Gundolbii casts for a barramundi for dinner.

3 Dawn on another day in paradise.

4 Pete gets another cuppa on.

5 An old mare wades out after feeding in a lagoon. Her foal was waiting on the banks.

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river, looking back into the timber for bulls. Huge termite mounds in pale grey or reddy brown could have been scrubbers in the vanishing light. I was peering into the distance at what was probably a fallen tree with light bouncing off its grey sides, hoping it turned out to be a huge bull, when a black silhouette stole my attention. A big bull with decent horns. Only 30 metres away. Watching us.

A couple of steps backward cleared the view of bushes between us. I chambered a round as I assessed the shot, shouldered the rifle and aimed just left of centre of the quartering animal's chest. Then fired.

The bull lurched, hit hard by the 9.3mm Interlock. Cycling the action, I could see I'd broken his shoulder but he hadn't fallen so I shot again, this time side-on and into his chest. He staggered, then his head arched back and I knew he was about to drop. In a moment he collapsed on his side, heaved a last breath and expired.

When we butchered him, we found the first shot was a fatal one, having smashed the leg bone, gone into the chest and hit the heart and a lung. I was stoked. My first scrub bull and a good one at that with black hide and white horns with black tips. Two good shots. A clean kill.

Peter, who is Blake's father as

“

I could see I'd broken the bull's shoulder but he hadn't fallen so I shot again.”

well as the camp cook, was waiting for us on our return. Pete is into his traditional skills. He tans his own leather using traditional methods, and makes long bows using Melville Island bloodwood and his own arrows from whiteberry bush (aka white currant bush). Happy with myself, I opened a beer, settled in and tried to soak up a bit of Pete's knowledge.

He and Blake are a good pair for this guiding business. Blake is filling his head with more and more knowledge of bush tucker and native plants. He'd spotted a black orchid growing in a gum tree on my first day, one he hadn't seen before, and became quite excited. During our stalks he'd often stopped to point out bush foods



7

and useful plants, making the hunts even more of an adventure.

On top of this, I'd seen and heard so much out here. One evening a pack a dingoes put up an incredible concert of howling, just out of sight only 100 metres away. We'd seen taipans and night tiger snakes, all kinds of birdlife, and heard the splashes of freshwater crocs diving into the river.

There are saltwater crocs here, too, but I wasn't lucky enough to see one.

Barramundi fishing is on the menu of these hunts. We cast a line many times. Gundolbii landed a 60cm one. I've never been much of a fisher and didn't improve my reputation this time, landing just one undersize barra that managed

ON THIS PAGE

6 Not the sort of animal you want to upset! There are some big bulls running wild on Battle Camp Station.

7 Now that's what you call a rub tree! Nothing rubs like a scrub bull.



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SCRUB BULL HUNTING



“

During our stalks Blake often stopped to point out bush foods and useful plants, making the hunts even more of an adventure.”

8

ON THIS PAGE

8 For sale. Easy restoration. No low-ball offers.

9 Welcome to Battle Camp Station.

to swim past my hook and get caught by the belly!

But for all this, I hadn't got a pig yet.

In the morning we left the dogs behind and stalked the river relying purely on our own skills. We wound our way through the thick growth, picking the best line by following game trails most of the way. They were like highways, full of very fresh tracks and droppings. Everywhere, the pigs had made wallows in the sand and when we found a big, fresh one we slowed — there was a good chance the boar who'd made it had bedded down not far away.

Typically, there was one bit of ground where it was almost

impossible to be quiet and the boar was there, asleep in a sandy depression at the base of a tree. By the time Blake saw it, the big fella was on its feet; Blake alerted me but then the pig was gone and I didn't even get a glimpse.

Further on, another fresh wallow indicated there'd likely be a boar sleeping nearby. I led between the high banks of a dry channel. Glancing up, I saw an unusual blackness: the top of a sleeping pig's head, between a stump and some fallen bark as if he'd made his own lean-to.

I snapped the rifle to my shoulder, closing the bolt on the way. The pig's ear flicked as I did. By the time I had a sight picture, its head was up and

he looked straight at us. I had time to register the red dot of the reticle resting on that head and suddenly there was only a spray of sand in my view and the pig was gone. So close!

“This is fun,” I whispered to Blake, who smiled back. The chances of success were slim but the tension kept every nerve on edge. I love this kind of hunting.

And if I failed now, there was still the spotlighting option. Or bringing the dogs back into it. Or setting up an ambush on a lagoon. Or ... well, Blake's guiding style allowed flexibility. The next days promised to be a ball. Meanwhile, I calmed my heart and slowly, quietly stalked on up the Normanby River. 📍

Cape York Bush Adventures

Blake Chippendale runs Cape York Bush Adventures, a new hunting venture based near Cooktown, Queensland. In setting it up, he has brought a long-held dream to life.

He guides on the 36,000ha Battle Camp Station and is working to add other properties to the list. Battle Camp Station, the scene of the first large-scale conflict in the area between Traditional Owners and Europeans, is now back in traditional hands under Troy Michael. Troy's son Shawn and nephew Gundolbii work with Blake, as does Blake's father, Peter.

This crew provides a unique perspective that goes beyond just hunting, adding generations-old knowledge and understanding to the usual experience you'd expect as a hunter. You come away having learned many new things, ancient and contemporary.

Cape York Bush Adventures provides a comfortable bush camp on the station. You can hunt for scrub bulls and pigs, and fish for barramundi. Full details are on the website: capeyorkbushadventures.com.au, 0482 554 813.





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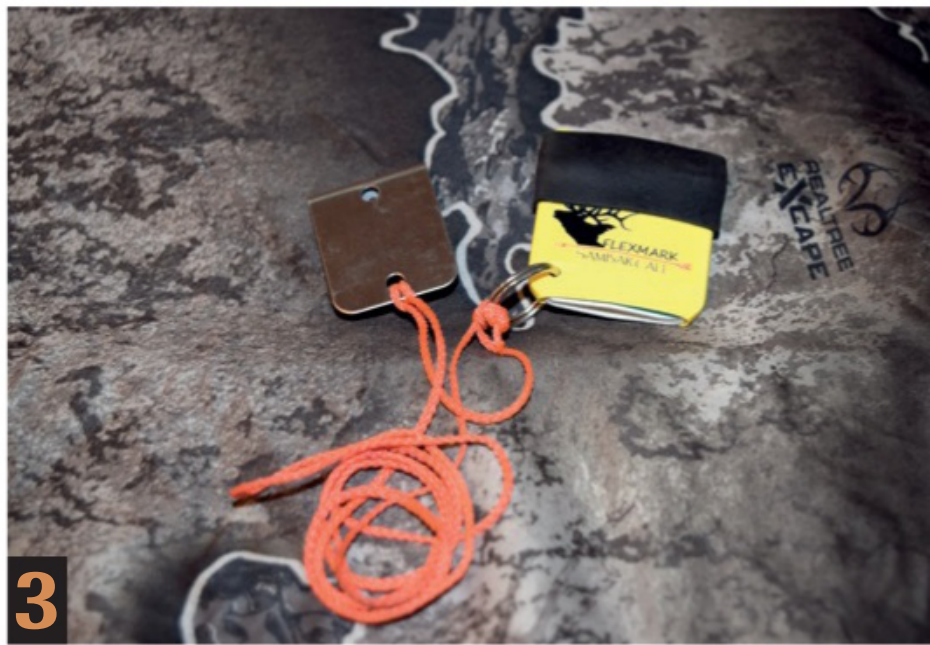
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The Aramberri Kid

Marcus O'Dean finds an all new fox-hunting experience, firing from the hip with a fast-handling shottie.



Marcus with the two adolescents that approached in long grass until quite close.



It had been years since I'd owned a shotgun. Then I found this very nice old side-by-side at Magnum Sports. The younger shop assistants knew not much about this Aramberri, but it was nicely finished, locked up tight and shouldered beautifully for me, so I went home with a nice new acquisition.

A FEW months after another irksome lockdown had passed I motored down the Hume to my friend's sheep property near Goulburn. When I met up with the owner around 9.30am, we went inside to get reacquainted over coffee and get the vulpine lay of the land. Gary told me that they were around the creek and maybe up on the pines a few kilometres stroll up the valley from the house.

Off I meandered along the creek, swapping sides as the light wind switched direction on occasion. When I stopped at likely stands, trying to get a panaoramic view from hillside stands, I'd whistle, first with the button, then a

Tenterfield. Over the course of an hour or so, I'd not had a sniff of a fox. As it was mid-December, I was expecting to be overrun by young-uns, but they weren't fooled by my alluring calls.

Perhaps it was the fact that Gary had accompanied me on many early whistling walks on his farm and had well and truly learnt the art, which meant he'd given them a bit of a hammering recently. No matter, I'd have to try something different. What to do?

When I had reached the point of sweaty frustration, I sat down at a fairly unsatisfactory flat stand looking east, away from the creek into a broad paddock covered with mid-thigh length grass — it had

been a good season for rain, post fires and drought.

Standing adjacent to and under the shade of small eucalypt, I dragged out my bag of calls and, with a tacit prayer to Diana, placed my sambar call (yes, you read right) between my teeth and let out a couple of mournful squeals. And waited a few minutes.

I was looking out across the long grass, hoping to see a flash of red where it may be thinner, but no dice.

Now, it often occurs that when you are fox whistling — or indeed any type of hunting — that something instinctive takes over

ON THIS PAGE

1 The fodder Marcus bought at Marulan Farm Supplies performed beautifully and shot mildly.

2 Fox scat, a bit fatter and shorter than usual.

3 Two of the calls used on the day: the Flexmark sambar call, which emits a high-pitched, elk-like squeal; and a Tenterfield-style whistle, made by Steve Larsson from the Shooters Fishers and Farmers Party.



“

I froze. He froze. I went to shoulder the gun and he took off. I let fly and flattened him.”

ON THIS PAGE

4 Old shotgun beats young fox. The Aramberri and its first kill.

5 The Aramberri combined with 1¼oz BBs was devastating.

6 Scroll work on the receiver is a nice touch.

7 Nitro proofing stamp on the chamber area of the Aramberri.

and makes you look in a direction that logic dictates would be unproductive. And so it was.

I was turning to one side, bending down to grab my backpack to continue walking and there was a fox, less than 10 metres away on a pan of clay. I froze. He froze. I went to shoulder the gun and he took off into some grass skirting the top of the creek bank. As he was at the point of disappearing, I let fly from halfway to my shoulder and it flattened him.

One from one for the Spanish double. Hmm, the sambar whistle could be the goods for jaded foxes.

Leaving the creek, I climbed up towards the pines, adopting a stand at a little thicket of tea tree on a mini-swamp. I tried to cross what looked like a shallow wallow but all I did was sink to my thigh in muddy water. What the heck! It cooled me down.

On I sloshed, up to the head of a gully just before the pines, then sat at an opportune place with some low bushes to blend in against, with the advantage of a bit of height and a good field of view. Then I started whistling with the button and Tenterfields, staying and observing for 30 minutes. Nada – zip – nuthin'! Meanwhile, I was out rapidly roasted in the midday sun.

In frustration, I again pulled out the sambar call and, you guessed it, a first-season adolescent popped up from the long grass to my half left just metres away and I had no time to shoulder the gun. Not daring to turn my head much, I loosed one off as he moved past me. The gun was not even shouldered — again.

Thinking this stand may produce more, I waited, blasting the sambar call again. Another adolescent fox trotted along 50 metres to my left front, where the grass was thinned along the fence line, seeming eager to chew on the hock of a huge deer. He could only dream. He dipped into the long grass more frontal to me and I lost sight of him until he broke cover immediately to my left, about five metres away.

This time the gun was under my armpit as I laid him out with a snap shot.

Man, that was fun! I didn't even feel the recoil of the gun shooting the 1¼-ounce OSA BBs at 1330fps. It was a pussycat.

I strolled home to the house, shared my good fortune with Gary and had a delightful dinner and endless conversations with him and his family. Next morning I drove home thinkin' I was a real fancy hip shooter. ☺

Aramberri history

Victor Aramberri founded his company after leaving shotgun-maker Perazzi as a designer. Subsequently, various investors came and went and the company changed hands several times before closing in the 1980s.

Sr Aramberri moved on, and around 1990 started up a new shotgun-making business with a very familiar name: Kemen.

Aramberri over/unders shared many component part designs with the prestigious Perazzis of the day, to the point that many of those parts were interchangeable. With V-spring hammers and detachable trigger assemblies, Aramberri's could be regarded as budget Perazzis, lacking nothing in fit, finish and materials.

It appears that my \$300 purchase was an unwitting windfall.

I was chatting with John Fuller, a stalwart of the firearms industry, and was telling him what I had been up to, including the subject matter of this story. He had fond memories of his father Mal Fuller being appointed the importer of Aramberri shotguns in Australia in the 1970s. In fact, John remembered visiting the Aramberri factory at Eibar, Spain, when Fullers owned the Australian agency.





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The reunion hunt

Almost 40 years after their last hunt, Andrew Makeham, his father and his brother get back into it.

The mid-70s through to the mid-80s provided endless opportunities to a kid growing up in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area. Foxes by night under the spotlight, rabbits by day in fallowed paddocks, and ducks on the rice at sunset. Then in the winter of '84 a different opportunity presented itself.

BY pure chance, we stumbled upon a population of feral goats in the area, and fortunately Dad knew the property owner. Dad, my little brother Ashley (who was about nine at the time) and I chased wild goats through that winter, rain, hail or shine.

In hindsight, we had absolutely no idea what we were doing and how we actually managed to harvest a few along the way is beyond me, but it was great fun. These great moments instilled in me a deep love and respect for the Australian bush, as well as the desire to eradicate the ferals that cause untold harm to this beautiful environment.

Winter turned into summer and 1984 came to an end, as did my schooling. I packed up and moved on, hoping to find my way in this world, with very little idea what I really wanted out of life.

The ensuing years brought girls, fast cars, marriage, family, business and on and on life goes. In the back of my mind I thought the firearms were tucked away for good, never to see the light of day again, but my childhood memories of those good times never left me.

Fast forward to 2017 when the National Firearms Amnesty commenced. It was time to square the ledger; do the right thing. Gun licence: tick. Firearms safe purchased: tick. Old clangers registered: tick. Strangely enough, I felt like a weight was lifted off my shoulders, and now I could legitimately and legally return to a childhood pastime that I'd missed so much.

But I also had so much to learn.

Interestingly, once I took the initial step of getting my licence to get back into it, at least eight friends





“

After a shooting hiatus of almost 35 years, I had no idea how the sport had evolved.”

and family members jumped on the bandwagon and joined me in my revitalised hunting pursuits.

After a shooting hiatus of almost 35 years, I had no idea how the sport had evolved. Thankfully, my current employment affords me the opportunity to talk to many farmers around the countryside. I quizzed many of them for information and feedback, as many of them are also enthusiasts of the sport. The old saying that “you don’t know what you don’t know” rang truer than ever before.

After lots of listening, comparing, research, and of course reading *Sporting Shooter* each month, I slowly gained some confidence. I was sure that the time had come to loosen the purse strings.

Over the next three years I purchased, traded and sold rifles. My new motto: “Don’t buy cheap

crap, always spend that bit extra.” I’m pretty happy now that my little collection includes quality stuff like Anschütz, Tikka, Sako and Sauer.

But time is precious and trying to get people together for a reunion hunt is easier said than done.

Dad is almost 76 and recently had a pacemaker fitted. Little brother is now in his late 40s and tied up with business and family commitments. And me? Well, I’m nearly 54 and have two stuffed knees, but hey, don’t let any of that get in the way of a hunt, I say. Just dose up on the Panadol Osteo and away we go!

So finally, after numerous false starts, we had a day lined up where Dad, Ashley and I could go on a goat hunt together, almost 40 years since our last one. Just like old times? Well, maybe.

With permission granted by the landholder, I was under no false impressions what the job was: “Nail those billies, as many as you can.”

We arrived right on sunrise, with an expectation that some of the mob would be seeking the sun’s first rays after a cool night. The range of hills faces due east, and immediately the binoculars picked up about a dozen goats playing in those first warm rays of sunshine. Game on.

The Hilux crawled in a wide arc around the perimeter of the



MAIN: Andrew hit this young billy with a good shot to the chest.

ABOVE: Ashley looking pleased not only with the goats but with his return to hunting.

ON THIS PAGE

1 Dad's first goat.

2 Andrew has set himself up with quality gear since getting back into hunting.

paddock at the base of the range. Not only was the sun beaming in from the east, so was the wind. We'd manoeuvred ourselves to stalk in from the west, wind in our faces.

Over the fence, up the hill and the hunt was underway. We spread out in a staggered formation, knowing that at any point in time we could bump a goat. The purpose of the staggered formation was to allow Dad and Ashley the opportunity to get a run on the board first, as I'd nailed about 30 or so goats in the 12 months leading up to this day.

The hope was that they'd get first crack, and then, as the mob dispersed up and over the hill, I'd have a shot at whatever came my way.

After about 20 minutes I felt the phone vibrate in my pocket. "Eyes on goats," said the text from Ashley. Within a minute or two I also had eyes on goats, but I had to wait my turn. I wasn't going to pull the trigger until they'd had a chance first. The crosshairs of my Zeiss

rested on the shoulder of a big brown billy. The seconds turned to minutes and nothing happened. What was Ashley doing down there? Surely his .308 should have barked by now?

"Patience, just be patient," I thought to myself.

Those crosshairs remained fixed, but I began to see more goats moving in my peripheral vision. Finally the echo of his .308 cracked across the rock wall, and in an instant I followed through and dropped the hammer on my big billy. He didn't move from his bed.

And at that moment all hell broke loose. There were probably at least 30 goats in that mob, the majority being big, old, gnarly billies. They took off in all directions and we all cycled the bolts again for another rain of Hornady projectiles. What took place in the ensuing minute or so was a blur. All three magazines were empty, and I fumbled for a couple of breach loads to keep the cull going.



2

younger trees, limiting their only natural food source.

The sexes of the mob was way out of balance. There were far too many old billies. I reckon there could be at least a six-to-four ratio of billies to nannies, maybe even seven-to-three, and a restoration of some balance was required.

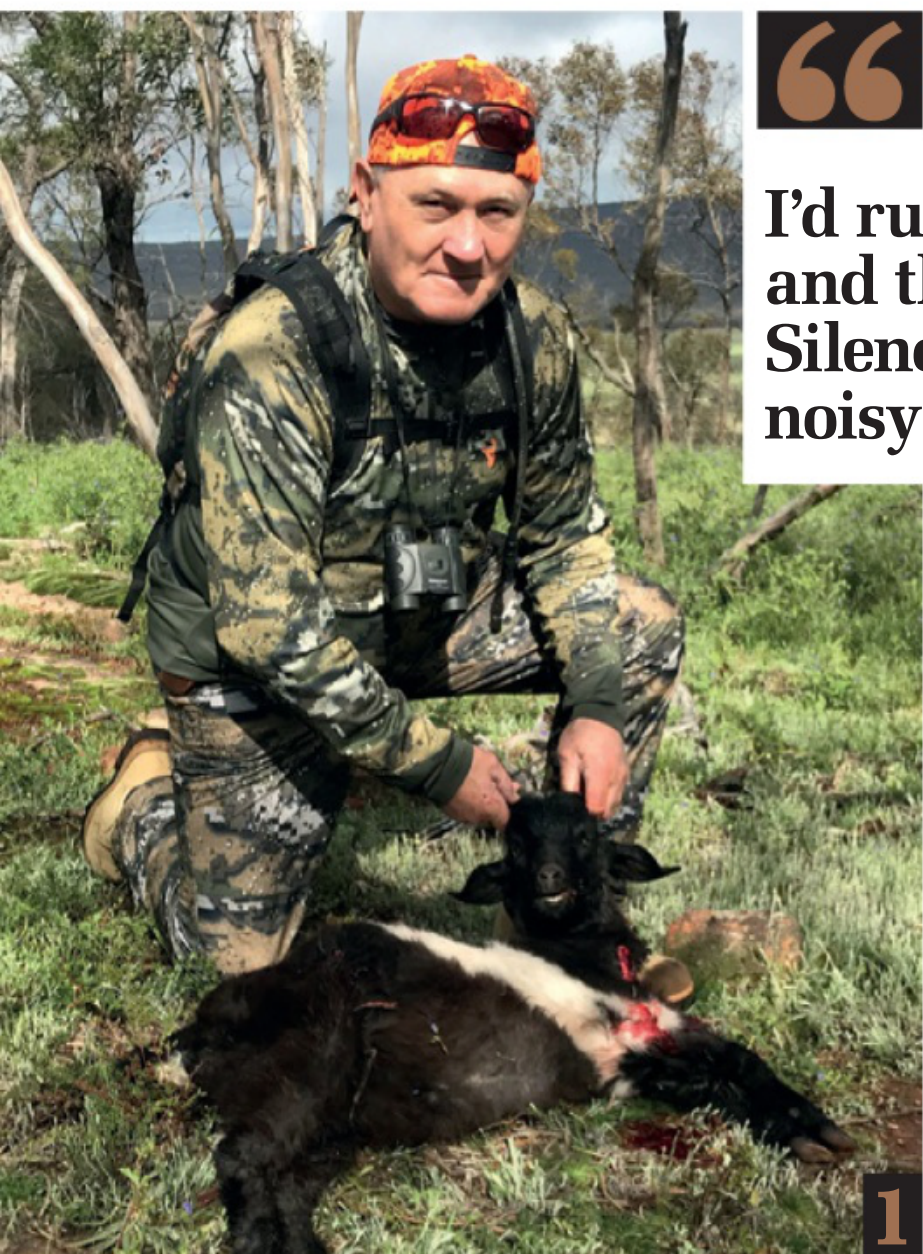
They have been trashing our farmer friend's fences and grazing on his winter cereal crops, costing him money in both repairs and maintenance as well as lost productivity. His request to us was to cull as many as possible.

Also, his merino ewes had just started lambing, and the wedge-tailed eagles moved in for easy pickings. I counted 12 of them circling above the lambs the weekend before. We strategically spread the billy carcasses out over a few hundred square metres on top of the hill in the hope that the free feed would divert their attention away from the lambs. As we descended the hill a little later on, we could see the eagles already hovering low above the carrion.

The two nannies were field butchered, with legs and backstraps taken for consumption.

Eventually we arrived back at the ute to pack up and head home. Among the chatter between us I overheard Ashley say to Dad, "I'm really glad I made the effort to come out today, that was a great morning. Just like old times!"

"Just like old times?" I thought to myself. "Nah, better, I'd say!"



“

I'd run out of shells and the barrel was hot. Silence replaced the noisy carnage.”

I'd run out of shells and the barrel was hot. Silence replaced the noisy carnage that had taken place only moments before.

Final tally: nine billies and two young nannies.

Now before the condemnation starts for taking out 11 goats in one hit, I'd like to point out a few things.

These goats have trashed some very sensitive environment. Environment that is home to at least two highly vulnerable species including the glossy black cockatoo. These birds feed only on Casuarina pods, and the goats have been preventing the regrowth of

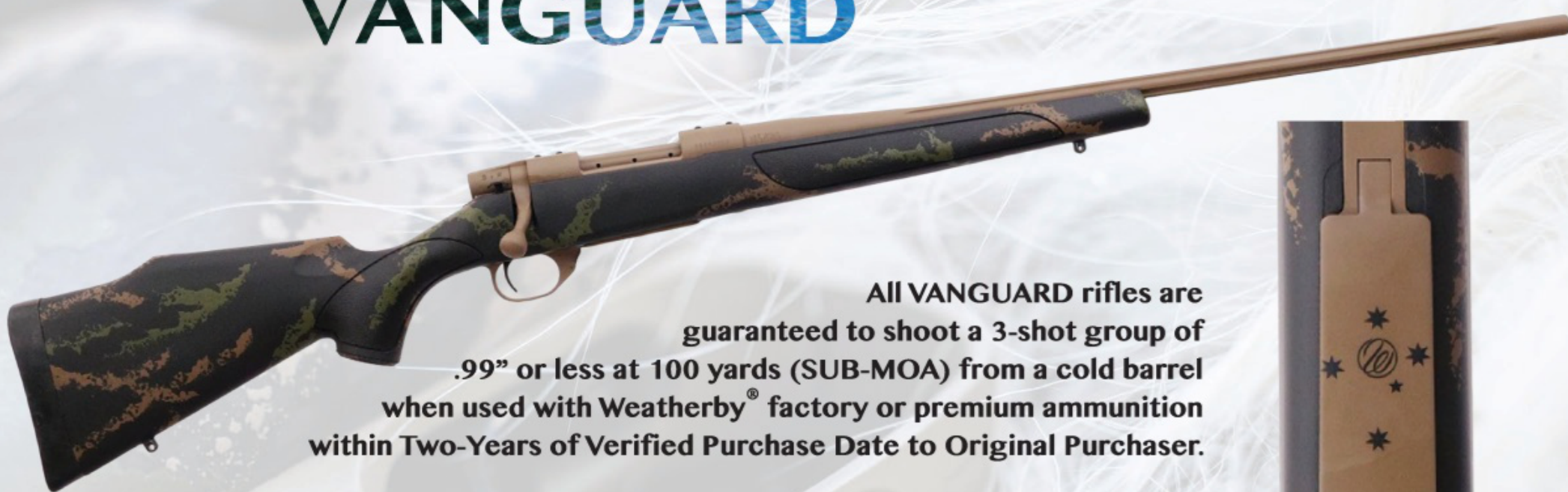
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SPECIES GUIDE: BUFFALO



Buffed to perfection



A nice representative bull. Front-on head shots are not recommended on bulls due to the thickness and the angle of the skull, which can deflect a bullet. INSET: A young buffalo bull in prime condition. At an ideal shooting angle like this, go for a heart-lung shot while avoiding the big, solid shoulder bones.

Buffalo are Australia's largest and most dangerous game. Brian Boyle knows them well.

The water buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*), also called the domestic water buffalo or Asian water buffalo, is a large bovid originating in the Indian subcontinent and southeast Asia.

TODAY, it is also found in Europe, North and South America, some African countries and, of course, in Australia, notably the Top End of the Northern Territory as well as on farms in a number of other states.

The wild water buffalo (*Bubalus arnee*) is probably the ancestor of the domestic water buffalo from which ours are derived. Genetic studies indicate that the river-type water buffalo probably originated in western India and was domesticated about 6300 years ago, whereas the swamp-type originated independently in mainland Southeast Asia and was domesticated about 3000 to 7000 years ago. River buffalo dispersed west as far as Egypt, the Balkans and Italy; swamp buffalo dispersed to the rest of Southeast Asia and up to the Yangtze River valley.

Between 1825 and 1843, about 80 water buffalo were brought for meat to Victoria Settlement on Cobourg Peninsula as well as Melville Island in the Northern Territory. When Victoria Settlement was abandoned in 1849, the

buffalo and other introduced animals (banteng and Timor ponies) were left there. The water buffalo colonised the permanent and semi-permanent swamps and freshwater springs of the peninsula. Within a century they had spread across the Territory's Top End.

Preferred habitats

Because they are heavily dependent on water and spend considerable time wallowing in rivers or mud holes, buffalo are more frequently encountered in riverine forests and grasslands, marshes and swamps. While their preferred habitat in the NT's Top End is wetlands and floodplains, they are also found up the creeks and rivers in relatively hilly areas that make the upland savannah country.

They also live in relatively dry country south to Mataranka, about 500km south of Darwin. As long as they have access to food and water they can be found in some surprisingly hard, dry country in the dry season.

In the wet season, water buffalo tend to graze flood plains and river flats at dawn and dusk. Around mid-morning they move to water to drink and wallow, before returning to graze from mid-afternoon until

dark. They retreat to upland savannah woodlands for nurseries and overnight camps, and for grazing on recently germinated annual grasses or green pick after a fire has been through.

During the late dry season, they'll graze perennial grasses on savannah woodlands as well as any regrowth after those big, hot late-season fires run through the woodlands, grasslands and swamps that have dried out. Water buffalo are more sensitive to heat than most bovids because they have fewer sweat glands. Wallowing in mud helps keep them cool. The caked-on mud also gives them some protection from biting insects.

Rifles and projectiles

Water buffs are big, solid animals, especially so when they are in great nick coming out of a good wet season. Be cognisant of the fact that your projectile may need to penetrate a centimetre of caked mud, 2cm of tough buffalo hide and 8-10cm of bone before it gets into the vital heart and lung area, where the deformed projectile may still need to travel up to a metre, depending on the angle of the shot.

Possibly hundreds of thousands of buff have been shot with a .308 from choppers, vehicles and on



“

Water buffs are big, solid animals, especially so when they are in great nick coming out of a good wet season.”

foot. Quite a few have been decked with a .222 or .223 at the base of the ear. But — and this is a big but — if you are doing this on foot, you need to be experienced and have the skill and confidence to place the shot exactly where it is supposed to go. If not, you could end up with 800kg of very grumpy buffalo bull looking for a dance partner.

You'll do fine with calibres such as the .300 Win Mag and .300 WSM with a good quality 180-200gn projectile that holds together like Woodleigh or Barnes TSX. You still have to target the heart-lung area or the spine to put the animal down quickly.

Calibres such as 9.3x62, .338 Win Mag or .375 H&H with 220-300gn projectiles are ideal and give you a bit more confidence for smashing through the shoulders or taking angling/raking shots, and for follow-up and finishing shots when they're necessary.

Gear for hunting buffalo

If your hunting involves driving bush tracks or around the edges of floodplains and spotting and banging buffs, all you really need is a bit of sunscreen for the arm that

ON THIS SPREAD

1 Buffalo calf meat is tender and as good as any veal from a farm. It's not all about the horns when it comes to buffalo hunting.

2 A small, aggressive wood saw comes in handy for lightening the load for the carry out. A caped head weighs about half a head left whole.

3 This .325 WSM 220gn Woodleigh projectile went through both shoulders from 100m and came to rest under the skin on the opposite side. You can't ask for better performance than that.





will be hanging out the window.

But if you intend to get out and walk and really earn your buff, there's a few things to consider. The daytime temperatures and conditions in the Top End generally fall into three categories: hot, bloody hot, and bloody hot and unbearably sticky. Lightweight, lighter coloured, cotton clothing with a few mesh gutters for air circulation is a good start.

If you are hunting with a mate, a wide-brimmed blaze orange hat makes it much easier to spot you across the other side of the clearing. Buffs can't see blaze orange any better than deer do.

Gaiters or cheap cotton puttees are the go for protecting your bamboo or lightweight socks from getting filled up with crippling grass seed. If you sweat like I do, chafing can be crippling; a pair of lightweight, mesh-type long undies can help greatly in this area.

Your daypack needs to be as light as possible. You may be carrying a fair bit of water and electrolyte mix to get you through the day. A water bladder and lightweight crushable water bottles are a must. I now carry a 750mL Yeti bottle with ice



and top it up with water so I have cool drinks all day, a trick I learned from a very smart, experienced and successful hunter up here. Drinking cold water has cut my water intake down on long, hot days by about 30 percent.

Buy yourself a Lifestraw and always carry it as a back-up. If you run out of water you can drink out of creeks and pools that buffs and pigs are living in. Your guts might gurgle a bit, but you probably won't get gastro.

Two other good things to have in your kit are: a small box cutter to open up the hide of the buff and save the edge on your knife; and a

20 inch aggressive-cut wood saw for cutting the horns off. Caping the head saves a heap of weight in the carry out.

In this typically featureless country you need a GPS, with a compass as a back-up. Always, always mark where you left your vehicle. Last year I bought a Garmin GPS watch and the compass feature has been a great aid in getting through flat country.

A pair of good quality lightweight 8x30 binoculars are handy for looking into shadows and vegetation for bedded buffalo and vital for checking long grass, scrub and into the shadowed areas of savannah palms when following up a buff that has been hit and has run.

Respect the buff

Water buffalo can range in size from 700-1200 kilograms. They are the biggest boys on the block and they know it. Generally, when spooked, or if they get your scent on the wind, they will just bolt. But if you surprise one at close range, or they have a poorly placed bullet in them, they may decide that fight is a better option than flight.

Always treat them with respect, especially when following up or walking in on a downed animal. Always come in quietly from behind and if you are not absolutely certain the animal is dead — really dead — put another shot into its heart, preferably down through the spine.

Safe is better than learning just how good your sidestep or tree-climbing skills are.

The country and the climate you hunt buffalo in are as tough as the animals themselves. If you prepare properly and have the right gear, you will enjoy the hunt rather than endure it.

If you walk for 10 hours in 30-something degrees heat, take a good buff bull and carry out the head, you will have truly earned a great Australian trophy. Believe me, a cold beer has never tasted better while taking off your boots under a fiery Territory sunset, with a nice set of buff horns resting against a tree at camp.

Life really doesn't get any better, so what are you waiting for? 



Foldable fox trap

As most will know, I enjoy my fox whistling during the cooler months, but by the end of June I find they tend to go off the whistle. That said, if you want to catch a fox or other small pests around the chicken coop or house paddock, our friends at Alcock & Pierce have recently introduced a foldable trap cage that will do the job.

In the past I have tried similar models that were a lot smaller in dimension that worked fine for smaller pests like possums, but a cagey fox will think twice about entering a small enclosure. This trap is available in two sizes, a smaller model for pests like rabbits and possums or this extra-large model that measures 123cm long by 55cm high by 46cm wide. The unit is made of 3mm galvanised wire that's strong enough and rust resistant.

The trap features a spring-loaded door with foot plate mechanism that will set off the gate latch and lock the door behind a fox. What's more, the cage is easy to assemble without any tools and when not in use can be folded down and stored for next time.

Other features include a handle on top for ease of carriage and a metal plate for hand protection. The trap could also be used as a carry cage for pets when travelling or a feeding box for rabbits or chickens out on the lawn.

Ask to see both models at your local gun shop or for further details contact Australian distributors Alcock & Pierce by email on sales@alcockandpierce.com.au or by phone to Tim Brewer on 03 9738 2400.



Crimson Trace red dot and refl x sights

Firearms optics specialist Crimson Trace now offers a well-made range of red-dot and reflex sights that are very reasonably priced and offer excellent value for money.

First, the new CTS-25 is a compact red-dot electronic sight for rifles and shotguns and features a 4MOA round aiming dot. Complete with low-profile picatinny mount for rail mounting, it can be installed in seconds and can be attached to M1913 Picatinny rail sections. This unit is fog, shock and water resistant, and features a side-accessible battery compartment, coated optics and large function buttons for brightness settings.

The CTS-25 retails for around \$149. Backed by a limited lifetime warranty, it is hard to beat for the price.

The CTS-1550 ultra-compact open reflex electronic sight is more for pistol shooters and features a 3MOA round aiming dot. The CTS-1550 features an ambient light sensor which automatically adjusts to the lighting conditions and turns the device off when the included cover is used, extending battery life. The battery is located under the device. The CTS-1550 retails for around \$279.

Ask to see the range of Crimson Trace optics at your local gun shop or visit www.osaaustralia.com.au for more info.

NIOA Hot Products 2022-2023

Well-known Australian wholesaler NIOA, which distributes such brands as Leupold, Federal, Savage, Marlin, Bushnell, Ruger and many, many more, has recently released its 2022-23 catalogue, available free at local gun shops. Since its last catalogue, NIOA has added the latest in up-to-date optics and firearm models, while also adding some new brand names to its huge portfolio of firearms, optics, accessories, ammunition and components.

New lines include Remington

firearms, Spartan bipods and adaptors and Bushmeister shotguns, which are made exclusively for Aussie hunters. That is just a hint of what you'll see in this free 490-page colour catalogue.

NIOA has also added QR codes to many products so you can now view more about that product online via your mobile phone, often on YouTube.

If you live remotely or simply can't get to a gun shop for your copy of the new NIOA Hot Products catalogue, you can see it online at www.nioa.com.au.





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Adler Model B220 latest release

Adler has released the latest version of the ever-popular Model B220 straight-pull seven-shot shotgun, this one being a walnut-stocked version offered in both 28" and 20" barrel options. Features include three-inch chambers in 12ga with Turkish walnut stock and sling swivels included. The Adler comes complete with three screw-in chokes, a seven-

round capacity, bead sights and finished in black.

Another great feature of the Adler B220 is its ambidextrous cocking lever, allowing operation from either side. The Adler B220 comes with a five-year warranty and is very well made. Ask to see them at your local gun shop.

For more information visit www.nioa.com.au.

Clenzoil firearm care

Clenzoil was first formulated in the USA back in 1948 by Captain Lenz, a WWII veteran who wanted to develop a product that would effectively clean, lubricate and protect from rust, particularly when in harsh environments. Today, Clenzoil is well known and well respected in many countries throughout the world and used by civilians, military forces and law enforcement agencies. I'm told it's considered the best of the best in its field and application; and what's more, it's very well priced.

Over the years Clenzoil has added many new products to its range, including cleaning kits and accessories under its Field & Range series.

Clenzoil oil is a one-step cleaner, lubricant and rust preventative and is effective in removing oils, lead, copper and other contaminants. Once applied, it will provide a thin coating that not only works on actions, barrels and moving parts, but will also protect wood, leather and synthetic stocks without damage. Available in a variety of sizes and including foaming aerosol, pump spray or oiler, this fluid is also available in pre-oiled patches and handy pre-saturated wipes.

Clenzoil also offers a large selection of cleaning systems that are ideal for use in the field or at home. These include pull-through style chords, rifle and pistol cleaning kits, shotgun kits and universal field kits. There's even a synthetic Gun Grease Syringe and protective firearm sleeve.

Ask to see the full range of Clenzoil at your local gun shop or visit www.eagleyehg.com.au for more information and a look at the whole range.



Vixen Optics

Vixen Optics is a well-known brand whose products are made in Japan, yet offer very affordable prices. Its product range includes astronomy optics, compasses, microscopes and more. For hunters and shooters, however, Vixen offers a fine range of spotting scopes, binoculars and rifle scopes that feature excellent clarity and true value for money.

For example, the riflescope range includes the 1" Traditional series that incorporates a compact range of scopes available in 2-8x32, 3-12x40 and 4-16x44. I'm told there are a few new models soon to be released.

Vixen's Euro series has 30mm tube construction, and all models have illuminated reticles. These include 1-6x24, 1-8x25, 2.5-10x56, 2.5-15x50, 2.8-15x56 and 6-24x58mm.

Last but not least, the Vixen TACT series are of 34mm tube construction and also offer illuminated reticles. These are available in 1-8x28 and 5-30x56mm.

To find out more ask at your local gun shop or visit www.huntingdepot.com.au.

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Spika ear protection

When it comes to hearing protection, Spika offers a low-profile set of earmuffs that are comfortable to wear and feature an adjustable headband. Add to this, they fold down to a very compact size, so you can carry them in your pack or store them in your range bag without taking up too much room. Featuring comfortable foam cushioning, they reduce damaging high-decibel noise and can be adjusted down to fit kids or up to fit adults.

You can take it a step further with Spika's electronic earmuffs. These are designed to suppress sudden noise such as a gunshot, while amplifying sound under 85db, so you'll hear most of what's going on around you. They also include an AUX input connection for audio



plug-in and an integrated power/volume knob conveniently located on the right earmuff. Another great feature is the automatic shut-off after four hours in case you forget to turn them off. Also included are two AAA batteries to power the unit. These earmuffs also fold down, making them compact and easy to store.

See them at your local gun shop or visit www.spika.com.au for more information.

ADI World Class ammunition

Australian Outback and OSA's Buffalo River ammunition packaging has now been replaced with ADI World Class packaging, but it's exactly the same proudly Australian-made ammo, in the same proven loads, just with a different look. So keep an eye out for this new packaging on your local gun shop shelves.

Australian Defence Industries (ADI) produces high-quality propellants and ammunition for the military and civilian markets, for both domestic and international customers. ADI can trace its ammunition back to the late 19th Century through the establishment of the Colonial Ammunition Company in Victoria. It played a key role in restructuring the Australian munitions manufacturing industry landscape over the final decade of the 20th Century.

Manufacturing is based at two main regional plants — Benalla in Victoria and Mulwala in NSW.

ADI World Class ammunition is available in various loads for .223, .243 and .308, in both packets of 20 rounds and bulk cans. See the new-look ammunition packaging at your local gun shop. For more information visit www.osaaustralia.com.au.



Swarovski EL Range TA

Swarovski Optik has again improved on what is excellent. Its EL binoculars were already renowned for superb clarity but now have the added benefit of rangefinding capability.

Referred to as the Swarovski EL Range with Tracking Assistant, these upgraded binoculars offer even better clarity in their lenses while also offering state-of-the-art precision measuring functions, a smartphone app to configure your binoculars to individual ballistics data, and integrated Tracking Assistant technology that will guide you to where you aimed your last shot.

Swarovski also offers the EL Range configurator app so you can customise your binoculars and

transfer your personal ballistics data directly via the app, which is available for iOS or Android.

These binoculars offer an integrated tilt indicator with a unique angle shot program that displays either the adjusted shooting distance or the angle and will measure from a distance of just 10 metres, so it's also ideal for bow hunters.

Another change to the new Swarovski EL Range binoculars is the fact the rangefinder button has been moved to the right hand side for better convenience.

Keep an eye out in an up-and-coming issue for a full review. To find out more visit www.swarovskioptik.com.

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The .277 calibre's renaissance

After languishing in limbo for many decades and depending largely on the .270 Winchester to sustain it, the .277 tribe has increased to seven quite different cartridges.

WHY Winchester chose a bullet of .277-inch diameter back in 1925 has been the source of unending discussion among ballisticians and gun nuts alike. If you want to get technical, however, the .270 Winchester is actually a true 7mm, for 0.277" bullets have a diameter of 7.04mm, and the bore diameter is 6.86mm.

It's history now, how Winchester's decision to neck down the .30-03 case (.046" longer than the .30-06) to take an unusual bullet size produced one of the most successful hunting cartridges of all time.

The .270 Winchester owes its widespread popularity to well-known American gun writer, the late Jack O'Connor, who plugged it unmercifully in the pages of *Outdoor Life* magazine all of his life. I became one of O'Connor's disciples in the early 1950s and subsequently burned out eight barrels in my .270 Brno ZG47.

At the time of its introduction, the .270 was the flattest shooting standard big-game cartridge in the world. The 130gn bullet at 3130fps has a point blank range of almost

350yd (320m), as the bullet will not rise or fall more than 4" (10cm) from line of aim up to that distance. The drop between 275 and 400 yards with sharp-pointed bullets in factory 130gn loads is 15" (38cm). With high-BC bullets in special handloads it is a good deal less.

For large deer and antelopes a good, strongly structured 150gn bullet with an SD of .278, handloaded in the .270 to 3000fps, has killed very dead all sorts of large and ponderous animals. The fast-stepping .270 Winchester enjoyed great success, became a world cartridge and today is still being chambered by just about every rifle manufacturer in the world. Undoubtably it is an all-time great.

.270 Weatherby

The next cab off the .270 rank was the .270 Weatherby, a belted magnum cartridge which appeared in 1943 and shaded the .270 Winchester by around 300fps. It was the first of a line of cartridges developed by Roy Weatherby based on the belted .300 H&H magnum case. Despite being economical to reload and outperforming the .270 Win, the .270 Weatherby never put a dent in the popularity of its predecessor.

It is rather strange that for many years the .270 Weatherby was the only other cartridge of this calibre made and loaded commercially. It took 65 years before another .270 showed up, but more about that later.

Its lack of popularity does not indicate that the .270



Weatherby is not a top-flight cartridge. The cartridge appeared a little ahead of its time because the American hunter wasn't as magnum oriented as he is today. Also, the .270 Weatherby was purely a wildcat at the time it appeared, and it wasn't until 1945 that Weatherby started commercial rifle manufacture; and some three or four years later before commercial ammunition became available.

The first rifles for the .270 Weatherby had a 1:12 twist and ¾" of freebore. Later, a faster 1:10 twist was employed and in 1967-68 the freebore was shortened to about ⅝". In 1995 I had a Winchester Model 70 .270 rechambered for the .270 Weatherby, obtained a die set and 100 Norma cases and

set out to reload for it. Despite the 24-inch barrel it turned out to be a real going-hell-for-leather rifle and cartridge.

The lot of surplus H4831 I used in it worked well. A charge of 76gn got the 110gn Hornady out of the muzzle at 3500fps; 73gn lofted the 130gn Barnes at 3350fps; 72gn had the 150gn Nosler Partition Gold doing 3250fps; and 72gn got 3100fps with the Lapua 160gn. The outfit gave excellent accuracy with most loads.

I took the .270 Weatherby to NZ and shot a fine wapiti, two fallow bucks and an Arapawa ram with the Nosler 150gn Partition Gold. Then I took the .270 Weatherby to Namibia and bagged a goodly number of plains game with it. My summary: as far as the lighter



species of big game are concerned, the .270 Weatherby is one of the finest long-range cartridges ever designed and noticeably more effective than the .270 Win.

It's a mystery to me why so little mention has been made of the 160gn Nosler in either the .270 Win or .270 Weatherby. It has better sectional density and ballistic coefficient than the 160gn 7mm bullet, and when pushed along by the .270 Weatherby at 3100fps, it churns up nearly 3500ft-lb of energy. It has the ability to penetrate heavy bones and muscles to reach the vital organs of large animals.

Couple this with a flat trajectory and retained energy at long range and you have a combination that's highly effective for open-country shooting. In addition, it will work just as well at close range as any bullet made. When pushed hard from the .270 Weatherby, there is no other controlled-expansion style of bullet of any weight that will penetrate as well at all hunting ranges.

.270 WSM

In 2001 the .270 WSM (Winchester Short Magnum) came along with a fanfare of trumpets. It was welcomed by delirious gun writers who ran around baying at the moon, declaring that the millennium had arrived. Based on the instantly popular .300 WSM, which had appeared a year earlier, it was derived from the .404 Jeffery case shortened to 2.860 inches and given a sharp 35-degree shoulder. The case has a rim rebated by .020" to fit .300 H&H magnum bolt-face dimensions.

Hailed as a magnum upgrade of the venerable .270 Win, the .270 WSM doesn't quite generate .270 Weatherby performance, but it gets close, at least with bullets weighing up to 150 grains. Not surprisingly, the

.270 WSM took off like a bush fire in a high wind.

The short, fat case gained extra velocity by having an improved length-to-diameter ratio in the powder column, which resulted in more complete ignition and more efficient and consistent powder burning — a benchrest-proven concept over the past three decades.

Rick Jamieson, who initiated the concept, says: "More square inches in the shoulder retard the forward movement of powder granules for a quicker, more complete conversion of dead-weight solids to a useful gas. All this combined with deeper bullet seating means that the pressure curve is better developed, more advanced and the bullet is going faster when its base passes the case mouth.

"Far less unburned powder is blasted into a throat and pushed down the bore. You can use less powder for less recoil and muzzle blast with equal or better performance."

A big selling point was that the .270 WSM was housed in a rigid short-actioned rifle, which had a shorter bolt stroke and was lighter to carry, faster to handle and more powerful. True, at least to some extent, because the .270 WSM's performance is way out of

proportion to its length. In a shorter, handier rifle it punches above its weight, carrying elk-killing energy of 1500ft-lb out beyond 750 yards (about 2000J at 700m).

6.8 SPC

A fourth .270 cartridge, the 6.8 SPC, appeared in 2005. It is a specialist round designed for use in AR-15 system rifles. A bit of a pipsqueak compared with its predecessors, the 6.8mm Remington SPC (Special Purpose Cartridge) is said to be a multi-purpose round which "represents a modern hunting, self-defence, home-defence, target-shooting, training sport utility gun".

Burning light charges of fast-burning powders such as AR2219, Benchmark 2, Reloder-7 and 10X with light bullets weighing from 85 to 115 grains, the 6.8mm SPC is capable of the modest velocity of 2550fps with a 115gn bullet from a 20-inch barrel. In the US it sees limited use on pigs and smaller deer species, but most hunters prefer something with longer reach and much heavier punch.

The 6.8 SPC gained only limited acceptance by military and law enforcement bodies. For sporting use, it looks to have missed the boat and has already become semi-obsolete.

.277 Fury

A most unusual entry in the .270 ledger is a cartridge recently introduced by SIG Sauer to replace the 5.56 NATO round. In sporting circles it is better known as the SIG Sauer .277 Fury. The US military has adopted it (see our report in last month's issue).

Breaking with tradition, the .277 Fury features a hybrid case which uses a brass body attached to a steel-alloy case head. This allows the .277 Fury to work at the higher-than-normal chamber pressure of 80,000psi to drive a 135gn .277" bullet at 3000fps, most surprisingly from a stubby 16½" barrel in the new SIG rifle designed for it.

Favouring a 1:7 twist rate, it is also capable of driving a 140gn at 2950fps. Factory ammo, however, like most of the super-magnums, tops out at 65,000psi, courtesy of the harder steel base to the cartridge case.

This method of construction saves weight because the brass and case head can be made thinner, unlike a case that starts with a brass cup, which is then pressed and drawn to size. The Fury's hybrid case has increased volume to accept a heavier powder charge and give increased muzzle velocity. The steel case



ON THIS SPREAD

1 Nick used three feet of holdover to cull three roe deer on cultivation in Poland with a Browning X-Bolt in .270 WSM. Range was close to 500 yards.

2 Four popular hunting cartridges that shoot .277-inch bullets (left to right): .270 Winchester (1925), .270 Weatherby Magnum (1943), .270 WSM (2002) and the new 6.8 Western (2021).

3 SIG's .277 Fury is a hybrid design featuring a brass case that's mechanically bonded to a steel-alloy case head to support chamber pressures of up to 80,000psi.



LEFT: Alan Moeller favours his Winchester Model 70 Featherweight in .270 Win for deer hunting. He shot this rusa-sambar cross in open country with a 130gn bullet.

catch up downrange and deliver a harder punch.

Obviously, greatly shortened barrel life may be a factor in how popular the 27 Nosler becomes, but viewed as a trophy hunter's rifle there's no denying it holds a lot of appeal for the open-country hunter.

6.8 Western

No doubt Winchester's 6.8 Western was inspired by the 27 Nosler to handle the tremendous upsurge in long-range shooting over the past two decades or so, and to stabilise the high-BC bullets developed to meet the demand. With a short overall length of 2.860", the .270 WSM can't handle bullets much longer than a 150gn spitzer in a short action. This didn't matter until fairly recently because longer, heavier .277 bullets didn't exist. The 27 Nosler probably scared 'em out of the bushes.

Winchester, with Browning Arms, took the easiest route by basing the new 6.8 on the .270 WSM case shortened to 2.020", a minor difference of .080". A maximum overall cartridge length of just 2.995" makes it just .135" longer overall than its parent .270 WSM. This didn't require extreme changes, but was enough to load extra-long bullets into a short bolt action.

This gave Winchester an

advantage since the 6.8 Western could use the same short action and barrel as the .270 WSM, the only difference being a different chamber. Maximum average pressure is 65,000psi — same as for the .270 WSM. Browning factory ammo lists a 175gn bullet at 2835fps and Winchester offers the 165gn ABLR at 2970fps.

Of course, there's a trade-off in velocity. With standard bullets, the .270 WSM is nearly as fast and flat-shooting as the .270 Weatherby. There's no trick to loading lighter bullets in the 6.8 Western to almost equal .270 WSM velocity. However, the shorter cartridge was never designed for extreme velocity and with bullets of 165-175gn it can scarcely reach 3000fps.

The 6.8 Western was given a 1:7.5" twist to stabilise long, heavy-for-calibre bullets with exceptionally high BCs and low drag, which shed their velocity more slowly, buck the wind better, hold up over the long haul and retain more energy way out yonder.

The 6.8 Western will be chambered in two great rifles — the legendary Winchester Model 70 and Browning's X-Bolt Western Hunter. The 6.8 Western cartridge is well designed and furnishes the type of performance modern hunters and long-range target shooters have been looking for.

Will it dethrone the venerable .270 Win, the queen of the mountain rifles? Only time will tell. 



FAR LEFT: The 27 Nosler (left) is a super magnum designed to shoot heavy-for-calibre bullets, but the 6.8 Western is intended to fit in a short action and shoot high BC bullets at distant targets.

LEFT: The 6.8 Western (left) case is fractionally shorter than the .270 WSM on which it is based but can accommodate much longer, more stable 160-175gn bullets.

head and rim give the added strength needed to safely contain the 6.8's higher chamber pressure.

The .277 Fury may usher in a new phase in cartridge development, since it has more or less standard dimensions. It uses a .473" case head, the same as the .30-06, .308 and 6.5 Creedmoor. As well, the Fury's overall cartridge length is held to 51mm, allowing it to fit in a standard short-action receiver. So far only the SIG rifle has been especially designed to handle the high pressures.

27 Nosler

Fifth in Nosler's series of proprietary cartridges based on the .404 case, the 27 Nosler is a real 'super magnum'. It was designed to duplicate or exceed the ballistics of other .27-calibre cartridges while using a smaller case and burning less powder.

Its intended launching next in line to the hot 26 Nosler was delayed and didn't take place until 2020 due to what Nosler said was "a lack of suitable bullets" to make it perform. Thus it wasn't until Nosler produced the 150gn AccuBond and 165gn AccuBond Long Range that the latest member of the Nosler tribe was turned loose.

Utilising a 35-degree shoulder and fast 1:8.5" twist, the new boy on the block is

400fps faster and has 11" less drop than the standard .270 Win, coupled with reasonably mild recoil.

Based on a blown-out .404 case, the 27 is naturally fat and beltless. It has a length of 2.590" and a rim diameter of 0.534" to fit standard magnum bolt faces.

The case body diameter is 0.547" just ahead of the extractor groove, tapering to 0.528" at the shoulder. An overall cartridge length of 3.340" allows it to fit in standard .30-06 length actions.

A case capacity of about 90 grains of water means the 27 is seriously over-bored, but it provides enough space for the high-density charges of slow-burning propellants it needs to deliver high velocities.

The 27 Nosler is built for speed and provides a 400fps increase over the .270 Win with 150gn bullets and a 200fps increase over the .270 WSM with the same weight projectile — 3400fps against 3200fps. The highest velocities with 130 and 140gn bullets are achieved with RE-25 and RE-33 but slower RE-50, AR2215 and AR2218 are needed behind longer, heavier bullets.

When you consider the long-range power potential of the 27 Nosler, it makes good sense to choose the heavier bullets for long-range work. They start a bit slower, but

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Smokin' dinners

Chloe's got a brand new smoker and venison to fill it!

ONE of the best things about being a hunter is the opportunity to harvest wild game for the table. With the cost of beef and other supermarket meats going through the roof, I am glad I have the ability to put fresh, free-range meat on our table.

So far this year, we have made venison jerky, venison steaks and venison stew. My fiancé and I have a brand-new smoker and now it's time to put it to the test with some beautiful venison backstraps from the fallow hind I got in early April.

We have never smoked venison before this, so a quick flick through google brought up many American recipes for smoked venison. Most of them had one thing in common and that was to wrap the venison in bacon so the fat renders out, keeping the venison moist.

Using this research as the basis of our recipe, we got cooking and boy was it worth the wait!

Ingredients:

- Venison Backstrap
- Bacon
- Smoked Paprika
- Garlic Salt
- Moroccan spices
- Sugar

Method:

Pre-set smoker to 110°C.

In a bowl, I mixed two generous shakes of smoked paprika, one generous shake of Moroccan spices, one generous shake of garlic salt and two teaspoons of sugar.

I poured the seasoning into a flat tray and rolled the back straps until they were evenly coated, and the meat was not visible.

Once coated, I rolled both pieces of backstrap in bacon, using seven slices all up. Insert the thermometer prongs and place in the smoker.

Keep an eye on the internal temperature of the backstraps. Once it reaches 60-62°C it will be ready to come out.

At that point, wrap the venison in tin foil for 30 minutes to rest.

Serve with whatever you like. If you're like me, eat it by itself because it is too good to ruin with other flavours.

Crack a cold one and enjoy!



“

Eat it by itself because it is too good to ruin with other flavours.”



ON THIS PAGE

1 Don't tell me you're not suddenly hungry seeing this!

2 Temperature probes in, ready to go. You're aiming for 60-62 degrees.

3 Venison backstrap, rolled in spices and ready for dressing in bacon

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WINNER



Matt Hall and his partner Sally busted this big porker while out with the dogs. Great boar, great photo, so we couldn't go past this for a winner.



With his daughter Ellie by his side (see Hunter's Gallery on page 42), **Wayne Gibson** knocked over this tough old boar as it cooled off in the 40-plus heat.



Sheridan Howell look pretty pleased with this young pig shot during a hunting trip with her dad, Ricky, out near Bourke, NSW.

Dean Christie-Johnston took his boys, Charlie and Billy, out for an after-school hunt in the Oberon, NSW, area and took this little boar. The boys had a ball!



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