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A prime hog deer stag photographed by Jared Matthews.



Hopeless dreamer?

Mick lets his mind become corrupted by thoughts of a custom rifle.

DO not hang around gun shops if you're not in the market to buy something because eventually you'll see something you can't resist. This is a fact, I know, and it's a case of doing as I say, not as I do. Because I'm hopeless.

I've decided I need a custom, classically styled rifle.

Shorty's, the local gun shop here in Mudgee, has had an unusual number of custom sporting rifles come through over the past little while and because I've been hanging around like a spare dork at a wedding, I've spent too much time in the company of these unique firearms. Many are SMLE-based customs built decades ago when .303-25s were the go, but not all.

I still kick myself for not jumping on the Eddystone-built M17 in .375 H&H that



ABOVE: A selection of custom SMLEs and Mausers Mick has been corrupted by at his local gun shop.

came through the shop a few years ago at a low price. All the hard conversion work had been done. It only needed re-bluing and, in my eyes, a nicer stock.

Since then, I have put a nice WWII German-made Mauser sporter in the safe that is begging me for a makeover. That rifle represents not so much a planted seed as a puppy that won't be ignored.

So whenever I pick up one of

these custom rifles at Shorty's, that pesky puppy starts leaping around — all in my head, of course — and I take inspiration and ideas from the weapon in my hands. So far, I've got a rough idea of what I want. It will have a nice walnut stock and deep, glossy bluing. I know it will look good and I hope it will shoot just as well.

That's the trouble, though, isn't it? It's easy to make an

old-fashioned rifle look a million dollars but there's no guarantee it will put three shots into a minute-of-barn-door group.

Most of my centrefire rifle collection is boringly sensible and dependably accurate. They're mostly made of stainless or Cerakoted barrels and actions in synthetic stocks. They function with slick efficiency and almost nothing has ever gone wrong.

In today's money, most cost between \$1000 and \$2000 new, and some cost a little less. That isn't bad for that kind of dependable performance and loyal service — not to mention MOA accuracy guarantees.

There are no guarantees with what I'm planning to build except that it will cost more than any of those rifles.

Folly? Absolutely! Not that it matters much yet because I haven't progressed past the dreaming phase.

That's what happens when you hang around gun shops too long. Still, there are worse places to spend your time!

MICK MATHESON
Editor

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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

Variation in primers

QI am puzzled by all the different kinds of primers available and have a few queries for you. Do I need to use magnum primers in my .270 Winchester? Would using a benchrest primer improve accuracy?

Jerry Wood

A All primers can be counted on to deliver reliable and consistent ignition for ordinary shooting and handloading, but the different grades of primers are intended for different needs.

Standard primers are suitable for the majority of rifle handloading needs. They work best with fast- and medium-burning powders. Magnum primers are

designed for heavy charges of slow-burning powders, where a more sustained jet of flame is required to provide full ignition. Magnum primers give a hotter, longer-burning flame which provides more uniform ignition and more stable bullet velocities with slow-igniting propellants.

Benchrest primers are manufactured with the utmost selectivity for consistency in the composition and quantity of primer compound and metal cups. The handloader working with ordinary cartridges for use in standard hunting rifles will probably not be able to see any difference between standard and benchrest primers, but



their extra uniformity will be very apparent to the benchrest shooter or a person working up super-accurate loads for long-range shooting and varminting.

ABOVE: You'll see an advantage from a magnum primer if you use heavy charges of slow-burning powders but benchrest primers provide little or no benefit for hunting loads.

Reloder 26 in the .270 Winchester

QWhat can you tell me about Alliant Re-26 powder? I hope to obtain several canisters for use in the Winchester Model 70 Super Grade with 24-inch barrel. Can you suggest a good, effective load and tell me what kind of velocity I can expect to get with the Nosler 150gn AccuBond Long Range bullet? The best way to sight it in and the trajectory? Can you list remaining velocity and energy over 500yd?

Keith Pollard

A I have never used Re-26 in the standard .270 Win, but it falls between Re-25 and Re-33 in burning rate. The Alliant Reloader's Guide lists a charge of 60.8 grains behind the Nosler 150gn Partition for 3022fps from a 24" barrel. Minimum overall cartridge length is listed as 3.23".

And that, with a .270 bullet that has the same sectional density as a .30-calibre bullet weighing 200 grains, is really something. The ballistics are a big improvement over the average 150gn .270 factory load with 2830fps.

The AccuBond Long Range has the high ballistic coefficient of .625 and should shoot flatter than the 150gn Partition over the long haul. Starting out at 3022fps and sighted in 2.86" high at 100yd, the 150gn ABLR is 3" high at 200, zeroes at 275yd, drops 1.6" at 300, 11.5" at 400 and 27" at 500. I'd call that a flat trajectory and then some.

Remaining velocities are: 2869fps at 100yd, 2721 at 200, 2577 at 300, 2438 at 400, 2303 at 500. Corresponding energy figures: 3043ft-lb at the muzzle, 2742ft-lb at 100yd, 2465 at 200, 2212 at 300, 1980 at 400, 1767 at 500. So, as you can see, the 150gn ABLR has

plenty of deer-killing energy at 500 yards and beyond.

.308 and .30-06 comparison

QThe 'expert' at my local rifle club insists that the .308 Winchester can be handloaded to equal the .30-06 when both are chambered in strong bolt-action rifles with 600mm barrels. This doesn't seem right to me, but he always seems to know best and won't accept any criticism. I thought I'd get you to settle the argument for us.

Andrew Millington

A In a factory load comparison with the larger .30-06, the .308 looks pretty good, but the factories load the .30-06 milder than the .308. For handloaders, however, if both rounds are chambered in a 600mm barrel, the .308 isn't close on the heels

of the .30-06 in performance, even with lighter bullets.

Most reloading manuals show maximum velocity for the 150gn bullet in the .308 to be about 2900fps. Maximum velocity listed for the .30-06 is 3100fps. And when we go to the heavier 165gn and 180gn bullets, the .30-06 cartridge maintains its 200fps edge over the smaller .308.

So your local club expert is wrong and should realise that the advantage always lies with the larger-capacity case. The more powder you can burn in a cartridge, the higher the velocity is going to be.

That said, the .308 is a versatile round which produces good accuracy with many different powders and moderate velocity with small charges. It works well in shorter barrels, can be had in short, lightweight actions and doesn't kick as much as the larger .30-06.

1775

RIGBY

[illegible]

.30 Belted Newton by another name

QI've heard of the .30 Newton, which is listed in *Cartridges of the World*. It was designed for Fred Adolph and called the Adolph Express which dates back to 1913. Later Charles Newton chambered it in his own rifles and Western Cartridge Co loaded the ammo. This was a rimless, beltless magnum-type cartridge similar to the .30-06 but larger in diameter. But what on earth was the .30 Belted Newton, which I read about in an article by Robert Chatfield-Taylor?

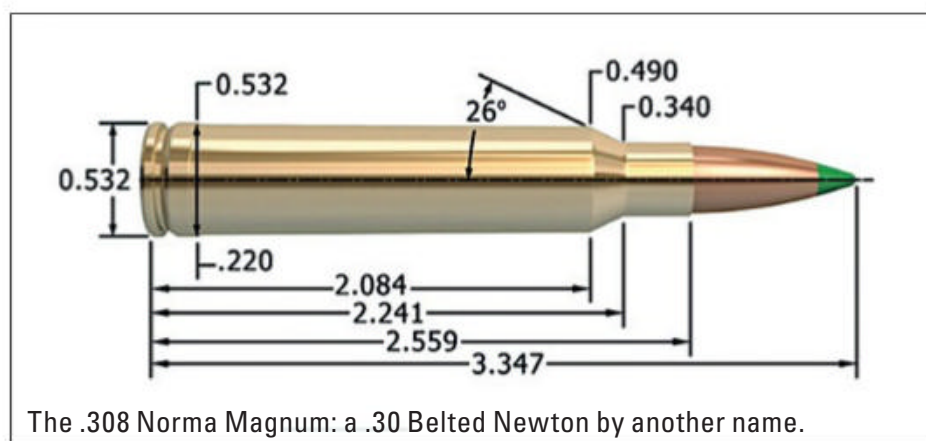
Ted Mason

A Well, stone the crows! We are going back in history. The .30 Belted Newton was a wildcat whumped up by Robert Chatfield-Taylor. Originally it was formed from .300 or .375 H&H Magnum brass, shortened and necked down to shoot .308 calibre bullets, and fire-formed to blow it out to the fat Newton configuration.

But that was a lot of work, so when the .338 Winchester Magnum was introduced, Chatfield-Taylor found that all he had to do was run it through a re-sizing die to make what he called the .30 Belted Newton. Later it was called the .30-338, and later still it became better known as the .308 Norma Magnum. Like I've often said: there's nothing new under the sun where wildcat cartridges are concerned.

Likes the 7mm STW

QI had a rifle in 7mm STW built around a Winchester Model 70 action and it accounted for three trophy deer during 2017. All were one-shot, on-the-spot kills at ranges from 200 to 350 metres — all distances measured with my Leica laser rangefinder. My favourite load is 82gn of Re-22 for 3350fps in my 600mm barrel. I like the 7mm STW so much that I'm giving it an



overseas outing on a plains game hunt in Namibia. I know you have had experience with the 7mm STW, so could you recommend a good load for hunting in Africa?

Joe Jenkins

A I had my Remington Model 700 in 8mm Rem Mag rebarrelled to 7mm STW. It saw use in the Northern Territory and Mongolia. The load I settled on for all-round use was the 160gn Nosler AccuBond and 74gn of Re-22 for 3030fps. This is one grain over the maximum charge listed in the Nosler Reloading Guide, but was safe and effective in my gun.

After using the 7mm STW alongside my Mauser 7mm Rem Mag, any increase in velocity or any difference in trajectory were hard to tell. I could see no real advantage to the 7mm STW, which was hard on barrels, and I knew of two instances where barrels burned out after firing only 600 rounds. My reloads had an overall cartridge length of 93mm with all bullet weights from 120 to 175 grains.

However, if you have confidence in your 7mm STW, by all means enjoy using it.

Querying O'Connor's favourite .270 load

QIn an old article on the .270 Winchester, you wrote that Jack O'Connor's classic load for his favourite cartridge was 60gn of H4831 behind a 130gn bullet. In several of his books O'Connor mentions loading 62gn of

H4831 for 3140fps in the 22-inch barrels of his two Model 70 rifles. Why did he drop the charge, do you think?

Stan Mitchell

A O'Connor was probably the first to chronograph loads for the .270 with H4831. He wrote: "With my pet .270 with 23-inch barrel and 1:10 twist, 60gn of H4831 gives the 130gn Speer bullet a bit over 3200fps." He also got the 150gn bullet doing 3000fps ahead of 58gn of H4831. On page 273 of his book *Sheep and Sheep Hunting*, he wrote about using good 130gn bullets in front of 62gn of H4831, but that was in two different rifles.

I got my first .270, a Brno ZG47, back in the 1950s and loaded it with H4831. In the 23½-inch barrel, 60gn of H4831 behind the 130gn Winchester Power Point clocked 3025fps and 62gn delivered 3073fps. In 1986 in a Ruger M77, 60gn of H4831 with the 130gn Hornady chrono'd 3039fps and in a custom Carl Gustav rifle, 56gn of H4831 behind a 150gn Sierra got 2930fps.

So while I am sure the 62gn charge was perfectly safe in O'Connor's rifles, it may not have been in many others. Obviously then, the variation in chamber dimensions, different lots of a surplus powder, and bullets contributed to varying pressures. I have found 62gn of H4831 to be a bit warm in some rifles. Consequently, when writing that article I played safe by going with the 60gn load O'Connor favoured earlier

on, after he discovered how much better slower-burning H4831 was than IMR 4350.

You can most likely duplicate the ballistics of H4831 with AR2213sc, which is close in burning rate.

Barrel life is unpredictable

QCan you shed some light on the subject of barrel wear? I've read so many different opinions about this that I don't know what to believe any more. I've been told that the throat will show wear after 500 or 600 rounds, and I've also been told that my barrel will stand up to 10,000 rounds. The rifle is a .300 Win Mag with a 600mm barrel. I load my ammo with AR2213sc and have the 165gn bullet doing 3200fps, the 180gn 3100 and the 200gn 2900. When hunting with the rifle, I seldom fire more than two shots at any one time and the barrel never gets hot. When I sight in I am careful about letting the barrel cool down. Can you give me an estimate of barrel life? I can't afford to replace the barrel too often.

Guy Ritchie

A Since you aren't firing long strings of rapid-fire shots, your rifle should deliver good accuracy even after several thousand rounds. No one can tell you exactly how many rounds you'll be able to fire through your rifle's barrel before accuracy begins to drop off. This depends on a number of variables, including the quality and hardness of the steel and the depth and sharpness of the lands and grooves. Most rifle makers use cold hammer-forged barrels, which in my experience outlast the average button-rifled barrel. Bullet jacket hardness, velocities and temperature, and a number of other factors, have an effect.

I'd say you can expect at least 2500 to 3000 rounds before hunting accuracy is badly affected.

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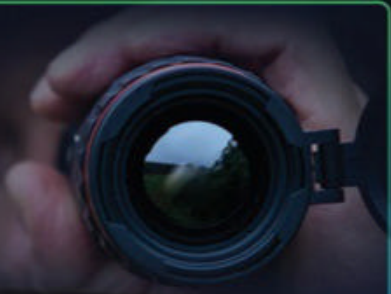


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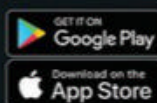
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Spare battery available



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Detection Range



**SIGHT App
Connection**



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Enhanced image
optimization



Winchester's Model 94 Canadian Centennial rifle was a commemorative edition, not a limited one, and more than 90,000 were made.



“

La Coruna Mauser no problemo

QI have an 8mm Mauser rifle which is marked “La Coruna 1949” on the receiver ring over a crest. The side of the receiver is marked “Cal. 7.92” and the barrel is marked “8mm”. It has matching serial numbers on receiver, barrel and bolt handle. The rifle has already been partly sporterised with the addition of a Butler Creek synthetic stock and Timney trigger, and I would like to have it rebarrelled to .270 Win or .25-06.

Can you give me some background on this rifle and advise whether the action would be strong enough for the high-pressure cartridges I've mentioned?

Donald Lynch

AThe Spanish Army was issued with this rifle (the Model 1943 Short Rifle) from 1943 to 1957, and it was made at La Coruna Arsenal. After the adoption of the CETME 7.62mm Model 58 assault rifle, large quantities of the Model 1943 Mausers were sold as surplus, and you have one of them.

The rifle is standard Model 98 pattern and has all its safety features, so I'd recommend it without reservation for conversion to .270 or .25-06. La Coruna commercial actions with a

solid sidewall were used by Parker Hale as well as for the Santa Barbara and Centurion rifles made in the USA.

Wants a .300 RUM

QI have a .300 Weatherby Magnum that's got a worn out barrel. I'm going to have the rifle rebarrelled, but can I have it chambered for the .300 Remington Ultra Magnum? Is the action long enough? Would any modifications have to be made to the receiver to get it to feed properly? What powders are best? What kind of muzzle speeds can I expect to get?

Nick James

AThe maximum cartridge length for the .300 Weatherby Magnum is 3.560” against 3.600 for the .300 Ultra Mag, so your action is long enough for the conversion.

The .300 Ultra Mag was made by necking down the full-length .404 Jeffery case to .30 calibre and fireforming it to have less taper and a sharper 30-degree shoulder angle. Like the parent case, it has a rebated rim 0.531” in diameter (base diameter is 0.550”). Case length is 2.850” or basically the same length and rim diameter as the full-length .300 Wby Mag, but with a slightly fatter body for an increase of about 10 percent in powder capacity.

Nothing is carved in stone when it comes to reloading.”

Neither the bolt face nor the extractor will have to be modified, but the feed rails may have to be opened up slightly to handle the fatter Ultra Mag case.

The only snag you may strike when converting your rifle to the .300 Ultra Mag is the magazine follower, which will probably have to be replaced before it will feed the larger cartridge.

Best powders for handloads with bullets weighing 180gn and more will be ultra-slow numbers such as Reloder 25, AR2217, AR2225 and Vihtavuori N 165. The outstanding propellant with all bullet weights is Re-25, which gets close to 3500fps with the 165gn bullet, 3350fps with the 180gn and 3180fps with the 200gn bullet.

Model 94 Canadian Centennial

QMy cousin recently gave me an 1867-1967 Centennial Winchester .30-30 Commemorative which I think was made in Canada. It has leaves engraved on the receiver, is unfired and in

mint condition. Is this rifle a valuable collector's piece? If so, how many were made?

Arthur Waddell

AYour rifle was made by Winchester in New Haven, Connecticut, and not in Canada. Both rifles and carbines were made in 1967 to commemorate Canada's 100th anniversary celebration. The smaller leaves roller-engraved on the receiver symbolise Canada's ten provinces; the two larger maple leaves symbolise the two northern territories. According to *History of Winchester Firearms* by Watrous and Barnes, 90,301 rifles and carbines were produced. There are collectors who specialise in the Winchester commemoratives.

Converting Siamese Mauser to .45-70

QI have a Siamese Mauser in the original calibre — 8x52mm Rimmed — and would like to know how much work is required to convert it to .45-70. What will have to be done besides fitting a new barrel and opening up the bolt face? Will the barrelled action fit into one of the synthetic or laminated stocks made for the military Mauser 98?

George Phillips

AIn addition to rebarrelling and opening up the bolt face, the space at the front of the cartridge feed lips of the Siamese receiver will have to be widened to allow room for the fatter .45-70 case to travel from magazine to chamber. The Siamese Mauser action is virtually identical to the large-ring Mauser 98 action. Consequently, a laminated stock inletted for the latter can be made to fit the former with only slight modifications. Years ago, Heimo Petzl made up one of these rifles for my old mate Wally Brummel, who shot a number of buffaloes with it. ☒



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Are some hunters lucky?
Damo Hart wonders if
we make our own luck.

Lucky country

I am lucky enough to live in the country and am in the enviable position of having several hunting grounds right on my doorstep. I spend a lot of hours in the field. It wasn't always like this. The COVID lockdowns and working from home were a godsend for my hunting, and in these months with longer days I have been lucky enough to slip in many after-work hunts, as well as my regular morning and/or evening weekend outings.

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THE vast majority of those hours are, of course, not spent taking photos of the game I've shot, but in stalking, reading sign, learning habits and, for a lot of it, just sitting still and being a part of the bush. The accumulated hours I've spent hunting would be incalculable, given I started in my early teens and am now in my 50s, so I reckon I've learned a thing or two about it in all that time. I have always loved going out for a hunt, often alone, but also with my various hunting mates.

Sometimes my mates mistakenly get the idea that this hunting malarky is easy. It is clear that luck can play a big part in a successful hunt, but a lot of preparatory effort may be responsible for making it look that way.

Case in point from the rut a couple of years ago, when I took my little brother to one of my favourite hunting properties to see if we could get him his first fallow buck. He, my son and I drove to the property well before dawn so that

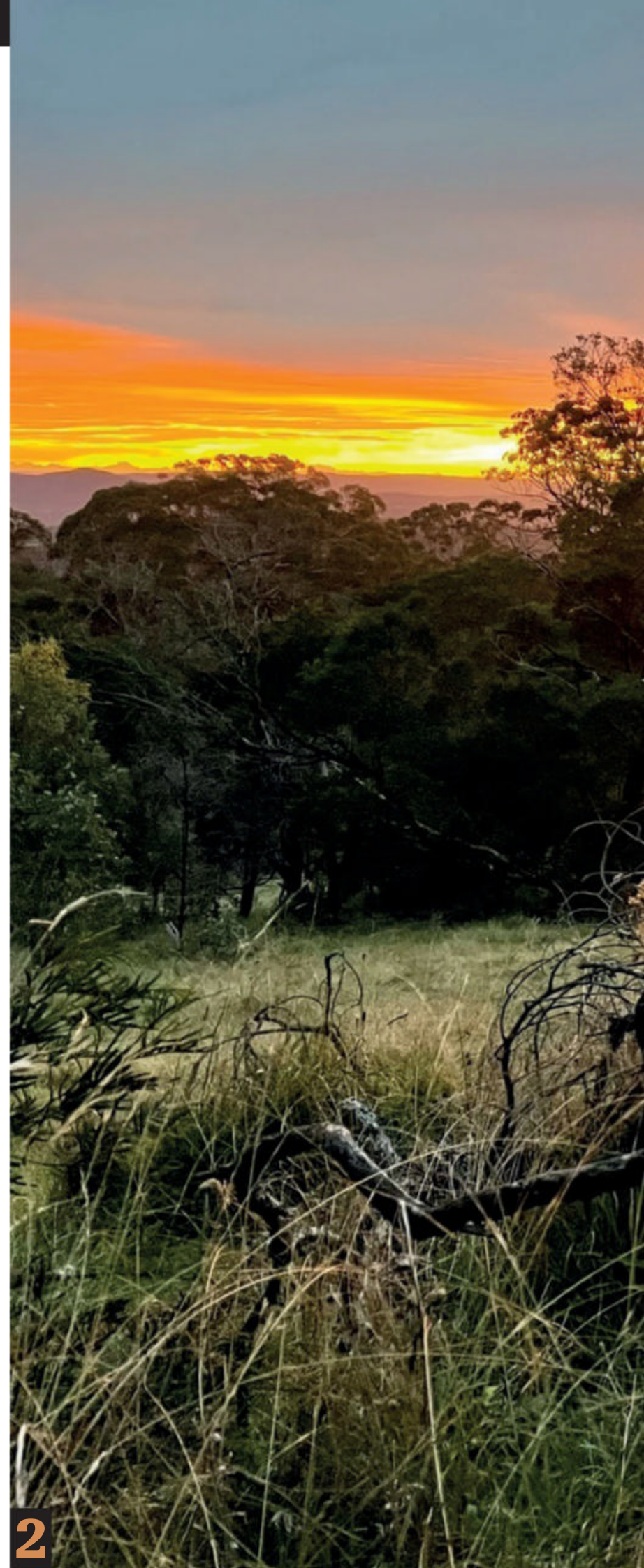
we could walk up and get in good positions before the sun's first light crept above the horizon.

We left the vehicle for the relatively short climb up into the back of the property where I positioned my son, Corben, on one side of a hill to watch the northern approach, and I had my brother with me on top of the saddle, nestled in between some fallen logs with a great view down and along the ridge.

We had heard some bucks croaking in the distance as we quietly picked our way to our respective vantage points, so I hung my Bluetooth speaker in a small gum tree 40 yards or so down the hill from us before we took up our positions. We sat back and waited for the sun to start shedding a bit of light on the subject.

As the sunlight slowly dissolved the darkness, I gave the speaker a blast of buck grunts from the Ruger iHunt app on my phone, and we promptly heard a buck to the south call back in reply. I waited a short time and called again and then within seconds an absolute cracking buck appeared out of nowhere, sprinting up onto the ridge top from our right to pull up right in front of us.

All my brother had to do was lift his 6.5x55, aim at the buck as it paused and then, bam, he had himself the second largest buck I'd



personally ever seen — the lucky sod.

Now, for him this may well have seemed like luck. All he really had to do was turn up and not screw it up when the easy shot was on offer. But the reality was that had I not spent the hours that I had on that property — placing and monitoring game cameras, checking tracks and raked saplings, identifying the

ON THIS SPREAD

1 Corben and Damo cammed up and staking out a favourite hunting haunt.

2 Sunrise from the spot where Damo's brother shot his fallow buck. The speaker was hanging in the little sapling in the centre of the shot.



“

The fourth pig also trotted out into plain view so I popped it as well.”

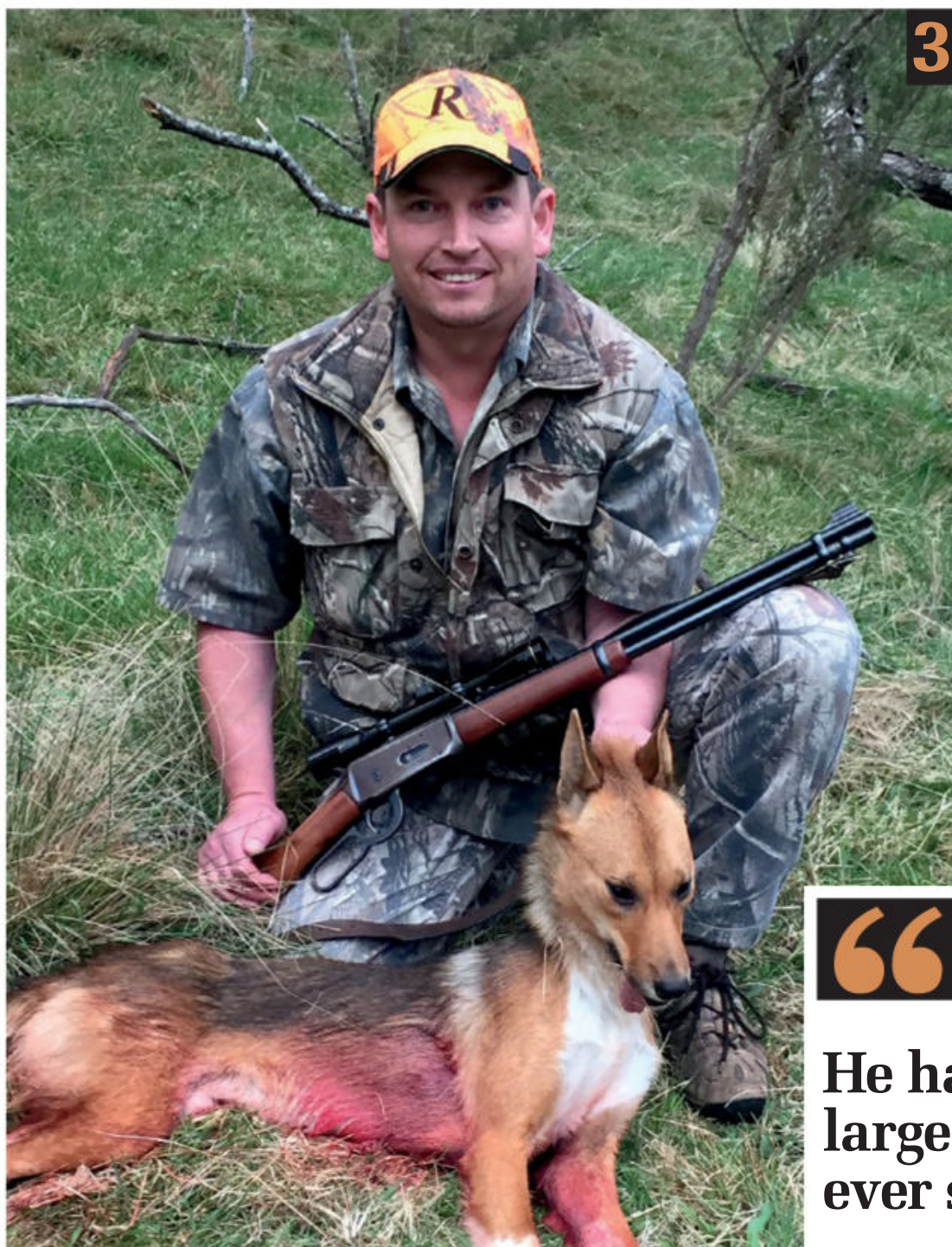
location of scrapes, having the speaker and app already tested in anger on game, and knowing where the prime spots to sit would be — then it probably wouldn't have happened and he would not have that stonking set of antlers on his office wall now.

My son was a bit disappointed that the buck didn't come from the

north instead but was very happy for his uncle to have had that lucky break. In my books this one might have come down more to good management than simply good luck.

A lucky hunt happened on the same property a few years earlier when my son and I were first reconnoitring it. Corben is my best mate and most frequent hunting

partner. We have hunted together since he was a small boy and even performed a bit of professional shooting for a while to help out a mate whose properties were being hammered by roos in the drier years. We have spent countless hours together, honing his shooting skills under the spotlight. He has taken an impressive number of



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“

He had himself the second largest buck I'd personally ever seen — the lucky sod.”

ON THIS PAGE

3 Damo and the wild dog that came out of nowhere.

4 A sign of pigs close by. You have to get out there to find sign, which will lead to success eventually.

5 It may have looked like luck to a casual observer but Damo put huge amounts of work into making this trophy an easy kill.

pigs, foxes and other game over the years, both in the light and on foot, and he is a far better shot on running game than I'll ever be.

Anyway, this occasion was not long after I'd first gained access to this property, which is owned by a lovely woman, only 10 minutes from home. I had obtained access back when the property had been ravaged by pigs, and while she was reluctant to have hunters in, we had met through other events and got talking about my approach to hunting. After that she gave me exclusive access, which I have enjoyed now for seven years.

She loves her native wildlife and appreciates that I leave them in peace while I hunt quietly and patiently, only taking out the feral species. It doesn't hurt that I drop in for a chat and some coffee and

cake when I get a chance!

Her love of kangaroos adds an extra level of difficulty to my stalks, since in the dry times particularly there can be hundreds of them on the property, but after seven years of me poking quietly between them they are much less likely to stampede than they used to be.

On one of my initial trips familiarising myself with the terrain I'd spotted some movement on the hillside above the back valley. That movement turned out to be a pair of fallow does. It was the first time I'd seen a deer around our area for 20 years, when a stray young buck hooked up with our neighbours' cattle and became my first deer — though that's another story.

I wasn't sure what the landholder's position was on deer

at that point, because neither of us knew she had any, and so I watched them disappear into the bush, marvelling at their silence as they pushed a way through the same bush that the kangaroos only seemed to be able to pound and crash through.

I stopped by and told her what I'd seen and she said words to the effect of, "Go for it, they are feral."

A few days later Corben and I sat quietly on the opposing slope of that back gully waiting to see if the deer would come back.

We didn't see any deer that day, but what we did see came as a huge surprise and a great stroke of luck. As we sat there in our camo, listening and watching carefully, suddenly there was another flash of movement and a brindled dog came flying down the hillside



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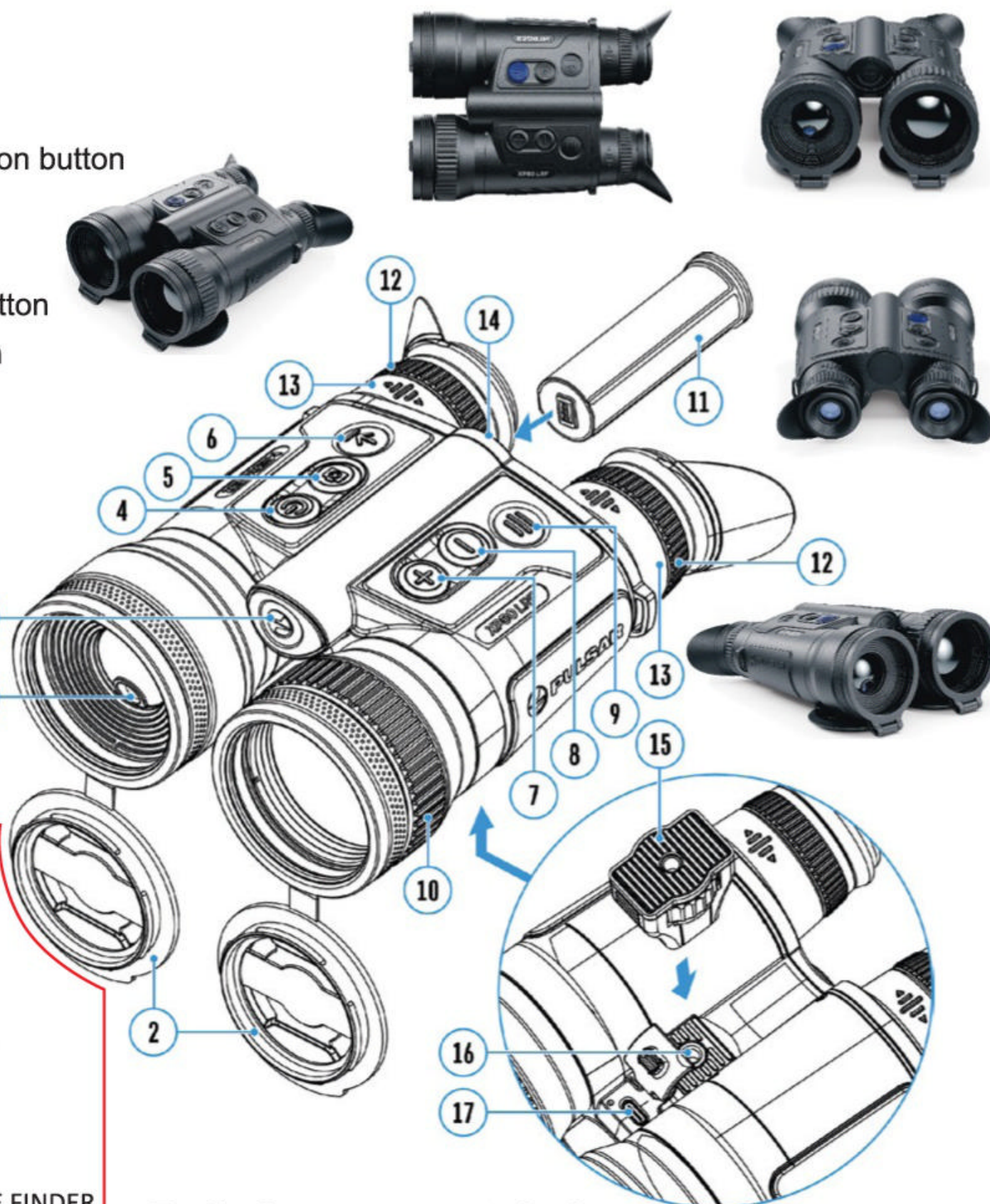
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6



7



“

Most of us know what fertile breeding grounds national parks can be for ferals.”

ON THIS PAGE

6 The four pigs Damo collected when fortune favoured him one morning.

7 Fresh sign like this means fallow bucks are in the area.

8 It pays to explore the bushy gullies because you might find fresh wallows like this.

opposite and into the gully floor, where it stopped.

“Is that wearing a collar?” I whispered to Corb, and when he said no I rolled my first wild dog.

The property is only one wild bush block away from a national park, and most of us who hunt regularly know what fertile breeding grounds they can be for ferals. In any case, I was very pleased to have added a new species to my record through such a lucky break.

My last story is perhaps the best example of lady luck smiling on me, despite it looking like exactly the opposite was happening. I got going a bit later than I like to for a morning hunt, and after pulling up at a new property, climbing over the fence and beginning my stalk, I realised I’d left my phone (and therefore my camera) in the ute — not a great start.

I turned around and had just started walking the hundred yards

back when I heard a series of gunshots from over the hill, where a neighbour had decided they needed to blast some inanimate objects. Realising that this was now going to be a complete waste of time, I resigned myself to just going home and having some breakfast.

This new property was on the same road as the property from my other stories. As I approached it, I noticed a bit of mist hanging low and so I thought I might as well do a lap before I continued home.

A short way in, after ducking under the first big wattle tree, I heard a soft grunt and spotted a pair of pigs digging happily under the next tree only 20 metres in front. I froze — as you do — and took stock of the situation. This was part of the mob that I had taken two from only a week before. Where were the others?

There were several patches of a low bush called kunzea scattered around which make for great pig cover. As I was scanning them for movement, one of the first two pigs lifted its head, looked at me and said “Whooff”. I quickly shouldered the BSA .243 and

dropped it on the spot. The second pig stopped what it was doing and looked at me, too, so it was on the deck one quick bolt-cycle later.

Conveniently, a third pig trotted over from behind the kunzea to see what all the fuss was about, so I dropped it on the spot! I cycled the bolt and listened, and would you believe it, the fourth pig also trotted out into plain view so I popped it as well, hitting it a bit low this time though it only managed to run 10 yards before piling up and expiring.

So, all in all a very lucky break after what was looking like a pretty ordinary start to the day. I was glad I hadn’t gone straight home!

I have a theory that you can’t expect to be in the right place at the right time if you don’t invest time in understanding where and when those places and times are going to be. And while that thinking has probably accounted for the majority of game that I have taken, there have also been plenty of times over the years when the hunting gods have smiled and chosen to flick me a little bonus for all that hard work. ☸

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There's never been a gun like this!

This new shotgun features a unique gas/inertia operating system which recycles faster and shoots smoother than any lever-action or straight-pull.





PIG shooters want a fast repeater for hunting in brush and high grass where shots are close and targets are plentiful. In recent years, this has led to the importation of a number of slick-functioning lever-action and straight-pull field guns. Now an even faster reciprocating action has hit the market — the Celikarms Buckmaster PB 12.

The Buckmaster is entirely different, a unique design utilising an in-line gas/inertia system which cycles in a similar way to many conventional self-loading designs and, in doing so, it all but eliminates muzzle rise during firing. Yet it is not self-loading and cannot be converted to work that way.

The gun is packed with a number of unique features that make it evolutionary, fast functioning and pleasant to shoot.

Its forearm contains not only the recoil spring, but most of the working mechanism. Like some straight-pull and auto-loading shotguns, the recoil spring is wrapped around the magazine tube inside the forearm and not housed in the receiver or buttstock.

The magazine tube fits through a black steel gas chamber made integral with

the underside of the barrel which houses a piston, then progresses through a short stainless steel tube some 4.5cm (1¾") long welded to an action arm with twin operating rods, one on either side. These rods, in turn, are attached to the bolt and slide forth and back to compress and decompress the powerful recoil spring sandwiched between the steel tube and the front of the receiver.

When the gun is fired, residual gas tapped from the underside of the barrel blows the bolt back, to where it is caught and held open until the shooter's leading hand presses a square button in the left side of the forearm. This releases the bolt, allowing it to slam forward and load a fresh shell into the chamber. At the same time the carrier is forced down, allowing the next cartridge to be pushed out of the magazine under spring pressure.

ON THIS SPREAD

1 The PB 12 is available with either a Turkish walnut stock or black synthetic stock. Apart from the obvious difference, the walnut version has a different recoil pad and lacks the forend rail

2 Streamlined receiver has a dull matte anodised finish to match the barrel and receiver.





A valuable safety feature: If you don't release the trigger after firing the gun, the hammer will follow the bolt and prevent it from firing. This feature also prevents the Buckmaster being converted into a semi-auto.

The design of the gas system minimises the leakage of powder gases, thus reducing the amount of residue which might get back into the mechanism to foul the spring and action arm.

Only slightly larger in diameter than the breech end of the barrel, the streamlined

receiver is slim and sports a black, non-reflective finish that matches the barrel and stock. It is machined out of high-strength corrosion-resistant alloy that results in a strong, lightweight receiver.

The barrel cannot be pulled out of the receiver once the nut on the end of the magazine cap is removed. It can only be freed from the receiver by unscrewing a locking nut on the front end of the piston housing.

The receiver has a loading port in its bottom. To load the magazine, you lock the bolt



4



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“

The Buckmaster is a pretty impressive performer, certainly a versatile all-around field gun.”

back and press the bolt release button in the side of the receiver to free-up the cartridge carrier. Thumb five shells into the tubular magazine, then press the button at the rear of the carrier plate. Pull the cocking handle back again and press the button on the side of the forearm to release the bolt and return it to battery. Once you become familiar with the loading operation, you'll carry it out automatically.

Disassembly and reassembly of the mechanism is described in a booklet accompanying the

gun and is a relatively simple process.

The Celikarms Buckmaster is chambered for 76mm (3") magnum shells and is available with a choice of a 20- or 28-inch ventilated rib barrel with five screw-in interchangeable chokes to give you a choice of choke restrictions. The tubes screw into the barrel at the muzzle and are completely retained within the barrel. The Buckmaster comes with a wrench for installing and removing the choke tubes.

Each tube measures 54mm

(2.12") in length and they are identified by a full, 3/4 (imp-mod), 1/2 (modified), 1/4 (imp-cyl) and cylinder, as indicated by a number of notches from one to five, cut in the threaded end of each choke tube. This allows the Buckmaster to handle multiple targets in a very short time frame. Incidentally, some of the choke tubes are steel-shot compatible.

The constriction of a full-choke 12ga is rated as running from 0.8-1.0mm (.030" to .040") with an average perhaps 0.9mm (.035") and throwing patterns of 70 percent. Modified (1/2) choke boring usually has a constriction of from 0.4 to 0.5mm (.015" to .020") and should produce patterns of 55-60 percent. Improved-cylinder boring generally has a constriction of 0.15mm to 0.25mm (.006" to .010") with patterns running 40-50 percent.

Beside the three standard chokes, Celikarms also includes improved-modified which is supposed to pattern about 65 percent, and a strong improved cylinder which has about 0.25mm (.010") constriction and is supposed to pattern 50-55 percent, challenging the modified boring. The cylinder tube has no constriction and most throw a 35-40 percent pattern at 40 yards.

You can screw in the cylinder choke tube and use it with rifled slugs for hunting deer and other four-legged big game. Combined with the Buckmaster's speed of fire, five choke tubes contribute to a versatile shotgun suited to a multitude of different tasks.

With its 76mm chambers, the Buckmaster is capable of using magnums, high-velocity 70mm (2¾") field loads and trap loads without adjustment. It is also capable of chambering any load up to pig-busting Super-X 76mm 00

ON THIS SPREAD

3 The PB 12 swings smoothly and encourages a smooth follow-through.

4 A second nut on the magazine tube must be removed before the barrel can be slid out of the receiver. With the barrel removed, you can see the action arm which has two steel rods linking it to the bolt.

5 A Picatinny rail underneath the forearm can be used to attach a torch for night shooting.

6 The Buckmaster is accompanied by five flush-fitting screw-in choke tubes together with a spanner wrench.

✓ SPECS

Maker: Celikarms, Turkey

Operation: Gas/inertia

Gauge: 12; 76mm (3") chamber

Barrel length: 28" (as tested; 20" option); 5 interchangeable choke tubes

Weight: 3.4kg (7.5lb)

Overall length: 124cm (49 inches)

Safety: Crossbolt through rear of trigger guard

Sights: Ventilated rib barrel with brass bead

Stock: Black polymer, moulded chequering with vented recoil pad (walnut also available)

Length of pull: 36cm (14")

Drop at comb/heel: 38mm/64mm (1.5"/2.5")

Finish: Barrel and receiver anodised matte black

Magazine capacity: 5

Features: Picatinny rail under forearm to attach torch

Price: \$1575

Distributor: Hunts Shooting Supplies, kayhunt@bigpond.com



“

You can screw in the cylinder choke and use it with rifled slugs for hunting big game.”

(15 pellets), which are bad medicine for hogs out to around 40 yards.

What determines the ideal choice of screw-in chokes depends on where you hunt and the game you go after with a shotgun. A choke that works best on flushed quail is less than ideal for shooting ducks from a blind, or walking up rabbits darting between blackberry bushes. Many shooters probably opt for more choke than they actually need and would bag more game with less.

For most of my field shooting, I find improved-cylinder the most useful, with modified in a distant second place. Improved-cylinder is the choke that many prefer for sporting clays. Waterfowl gunners usually start with modified when shooting ducks over decoys with steel shot, but are likely to switch to full for passing shots. That's one of the great advantages of screw-in chokes; in the field, if you discover that the barrel on your gun is choked too tight or too loose, you simply reach in your pocket for a better choice.

When calling foxes to the gun, there's no flies on a heavy load of BBs and a full choke. A full grown fox can be tough to put down, so you want to concentrate a thick swarm of shot on his head-neck area out to 30 yards or so.

The barrel is chrome-molybdenum steel, cold hammer-forged to length and shape, then reamed to gauge. The barrel, bolt and carrier are a dull black to blend in with the black anodised receiver and polymer stock. The barrel

features a flat ventilated rib with a single front brass bead to aim with.

Starting at the breech, the Buckmaster has a long forcing cone, after which is an over-bored increment of 18.7mm (.736”), a fairly moderate increase over the nominal 18.5mm (.729”) that is standard in 18.8mm (.740”) bores. The bore tapers down over a span of 205mm (8.07”) to 18.4mm (.725”). This gradual amount of restriction helps keep velocity up while limiting pellet deformation.

The shot charge then enters the screw-in choke. The chokes, which are conical-parallel, form a rounded bulge inside the muzzle of the gun.

The full choke tube used for testing had an inside diameter of 17.1mm (.672”) at the rear, gradually flaring to 18.4mm (.726”) at the muzzle end. There is barely any visible flare on the outside of the barrel; it expands from 28mm (1.10”) behind the choke tube to 28.1mm (1.108”) at the muzzle. The slight bulge at the muzzle is hard to discern and in no way intrusive.

The Buckmaster's maker wisely advises against using steel shot in the full choke tube, recommending instead to use steel shot in the modified choke for long range hunting of game birds where shots of about 30 metres are common. This will be the



8

ON THIS PAGE

7 Magic button: Pressing this button on the forend re-sets the Buckmaster's action, ready to shoot. This system is the secret to the gun's success.

8 The carrier tilts up to chamber a cartridge. Bolt release button is located on the side of the receiver.



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9



ON THIS PAGE

9 The Buckmaster proved a capable performer on clay targets shooting Trust high-velocity trap loads.

10 The Buckmaster works via a gas-inertia system. Gas tapped off from the barrel impinges on an action arm to compress the powerful return spring. The gas piston is housed in a steel chamber which is an integral part of the barrel.

“

The gun's mild recoil is hardly felt and the handling characteristics were spot-on.”

equivalent of a full-choke pattern with lead shot, and will be true with all steel shot sizes up to and including No 2. The improved-cylinder choke, on the other hand, will produce the equivalent of a (lead) modified choke pattern. They also say that all steel shot larger than No 2 should be used only with the improved-cylinder choke tube.

There's a positive crossbolt safety located in the rear of the trigger guard, where it is easy to reach. The removable trigger group is easily detached by punching out a single pin located on the rear of the receiver. The trigger is very good, breaking cleanly at 2.9kg (6.5lb).

The Buckmaster measures 124cm (49 inches) overall with a 28-inch barrel and weighs 3.4kg (7.75lb).

The synthetic stock's pistol grip and forearm have moulded-in chequering, and an ergonomically designed recoil pad graces the butt. Drop at comb is 38mm (1.5") and at the heel 64mm (2.5").

An enhancement feature is a short 73mm (2.9") Weaver-type rail moulded into the underside of the forearm, which enables you to attach a torch for night shooting.

I enlisted the aid of Nick Jnr to test the gun on thrown clays and to allow me to check how long it took the gun to empty the magazine, and it ran dry in about 10 seconds. The maximum rate of fire has little to do with game hunting, since the gunner has to recover from the recoil and adjust his aim before firing at a fresh target, but you can be sure the gun will be ready if you are.

The first good shooting test load was Trust Competition Trap loaded with 32g (1½oz) of hard #7½ shot. This charge is listed at 1250fps and it simply powdered the clay targets. The two game-shooting loads we tried were Winchester's 70mm Super Ranger and Bushman ammo. The former is loaded with 32 grams of hard No 4 shot at 1350fps and the latter with 34 grams of BBs at 1275fps. Both loads threw

excellent full-choke patterns out to 40yd.

Sales of over 2000 of these guns give an indication that hunters are aware of what it is capable of. Overall, the Buckmaster is a pretty impressive performer, certainly a versatile all-around field gun. It handles in a lively fashion and is well balanced. It never malfunctioned, no matter what we fed it, just as long as we followed the instructions and treated it properly.

The gun's mild recoil is hardly felt and shooting and swinging proved that the handling characteristics were spot-on. It swung smoothly and encouraged a smooth follow-through, critical for hits on crossing targets. Obviously, the shooter

was pointing the gun correctly and kept it moving because it smashed clays most convincingly.

The Buckmaster is a rugged, reliable gun that combines rapid firepower with reliable functioning and versatility. It will handle almost any 12-gauge cartridge you feed it for any kind of hunting, from waterfowl to pigs and deer. Because of its durability and being able to withstand a tremendous amount of shooting with minimal maintenance, I can recommend it to pig hunters without reservation. 

10

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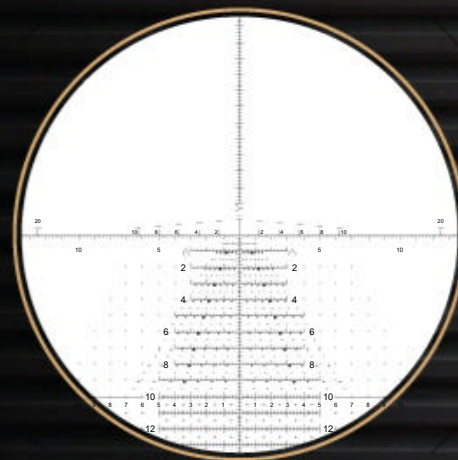
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ZeroTech Thrive HD 4-16x44 IR scope

Designed and developed in Australia, this ZeroTech rifle scope balances budget with long-range hunting performance.



YOU could call this the Goldilocks of rifle scopes. For size, magnification and optical quality, it sits in the middle and seems just right for a long-range hunting scope, all at a price that's not too hot with quality that won't leave you cold.

The Thrive series of rifle scopes form the middle range of ZeroTech's optics — with the HD models stepping a little higher in glass quality — and this model's 4-16x44 spec puts it about in the centre for size and magnification.

It makes it a prime candidate if you're looking for a scope to suit a rifle that will stretch out to targets hundreds of metres away yet can still feasibly be carried around in the field, at least over short to medium distances.

At 650 grams, with a length of about 37cm with its lens

caps, this is not the kind of scope that will weigh you down unless you're really chasing a lightweight mountain outfit.

It's 4x low-end magnification will probably never hinder you at close range when you need fast target acquisition, yet its 16x top-end is ample for almost any target at ranges where most calibres and shooters are capable of humanely killing.

It has capped turrets so they won't be accidentally 'adjusted' if they're rubbing against your back as you carry the rifle slung on your shoulder. There's nothing worse than missing because your exposed turrets turned without you knowing it, throwing off your rifle's zero.

With all that, I'd be quite happy to mount the ZeroTech on a suitably accurate sporter-

weight rifle in, say, .270 or .300 Win Mag if I were ambitious enough to shoot it at deer or pigs 500m away, but for this review I mounted the scope on a rifle in 6.5 Creedmoor with a 26-inch heavy barrel. In my mind, this combination made an ideal match.

It'd proved excellent on a couple of blocks where I can get a vehicle in quietly to the edge of large, open paddocks and snipe pigs and goats from 300m or more; and also where I can do a short-ish walk through scrub to set up in similar fashion.

Sighting in at 100m was dead easy. At 16x magnification I could see my hits and adjust accordingly. The reticle adjustments in milliradians were accurate and, vitally, repeatable, because I knew I'd be adjusting

“

The adjustments in milliradians were accurate and, vitally, repeatable.”

the turrets to allow for longer shots. I got the rifle shooting 8cm high at 100m so I'd have a point blank range to about 250m for closer shots at mid-sized animals, then printed a cheat sheet telling me how many clicks up I'd need for longer ranges.

The clicks you feel when adjusting the aim are sharp and precise, so you can confidently count your way through them. Of course, the



2



3 4



turrets are marked to show how far you've gone, too.

With its 30mm main tube there's a generous range of adjustment — 26MRAD vertically and 20MRAD horizontally (90 and 69 MOA respectively).

Once satisfied, I re-set the turrets to zero with the help of the cute little special tool that's supplied with the Thrive HD, then replaced the turret caps. There's no zero stop but

when do hunting situations ever call for one? (We'll skip the details about checking that the cheat sheet matched the ballistic reality; that's a story for a different article.)

The first focal plane reticle is well designed for a hunting rifle you'll use over longer ranges. Appropriately, ZeroTech calls it the LR Hunter and you can tell plenty of thought went into it. It's not too busy and lacks excessive

distractions. The graduations are clear and using them to adjust your aim for range and windage is a cinch if you prefer to do that rather than adjust the turrets.

Like the adjustments, the markings are in milliradians, which might seem an obvious thing to do but, strangely, many scopes do not have complementary settings.

At full magnification, when the reticle appears at its

ON THIS SPREAD

1 This ZeroTech is a medium sized scope so suits a sporter-weight rifle as much as it does this one.

2 The Thrive HD is built to be practical. Its aluminium flip-up lens caps are strong and quick to use, and the turrets are capped for protection.

3 Side-mounted parallax adjustment is handy.

4 The 4-16x magnification is about spot on for a long-range hunting scope. Note fast-focus diopter adjustment.



PRODUCT REVIEW



“

The view through the HD glass is beautiful: bright, with a claimed 92% light transmission.”

largest, it won't obscure your target unless you're shooting bunnies at 300m-plus; the markings are fine enough and the centre dot is small enough.

However, at minimum magnification, when the reticle appears quite small, you can lose its details against a complex background, or one that doesn't contrast with the reticle. I never really had a problem with this, but it's possible you might find a situation where it slows you down just a bit.

The illumination helps there by highlighting the centre crosshairs, and switching it on is a simple matter of pressing the button at the end of the left turret. Each press brightens it step by step until finally switching it off.

The view through the HD glass is beautiful: bright, with a claimed 92 per cent light transmission, and with a nice amount of contrast. Vision is clear almost right to the edges, where the merest hint of blur isn't enough to worry you. This is another scope that proves you don't need to spend a fortune to get excellent glass quality.

Eye relief is just over 90mm, which is plenty, especially on a heavier rifle. As you'd expect, it's fairly critical to get your eye the right distance away at 16x magnification but the range is far more generous as magnification is wound down.

As the light fades and the scope's exit pupil becomes more important to vision, the 16x zoom and 44mm objective lens reduce the pupil to just 2.75mm, but that's a physical property you can't change without zooming out or having a bigger objective. Down at around 8x I found the Thrive HD to be fine until the light had fallen to the point where my own eyes were no better.

If low-light shooting were a more important issue, the Thrive HD 3-18x56 would be a very tempting alternative to this scope, because you have a bigger exit pupil even at 18x. Not only does that scope have a greater range of magnification, but it's the same price as this one, although the main trade-offs would be in weight and bulk. The reticle is different, too.

I am sure the field of view of the 4-16x44 is a bit more

generous than the claimed 9.2m wide at 100m distance on 4x, reducing to 2.3m wide at 16x. It appears wider.

ZeroTech has provided parallax adjustment via the turret on the left side of the scope, where it's most convenient. Adjustment goes from 10m out to infinity. The Thrive HD also has a fast-focus eyepiece.

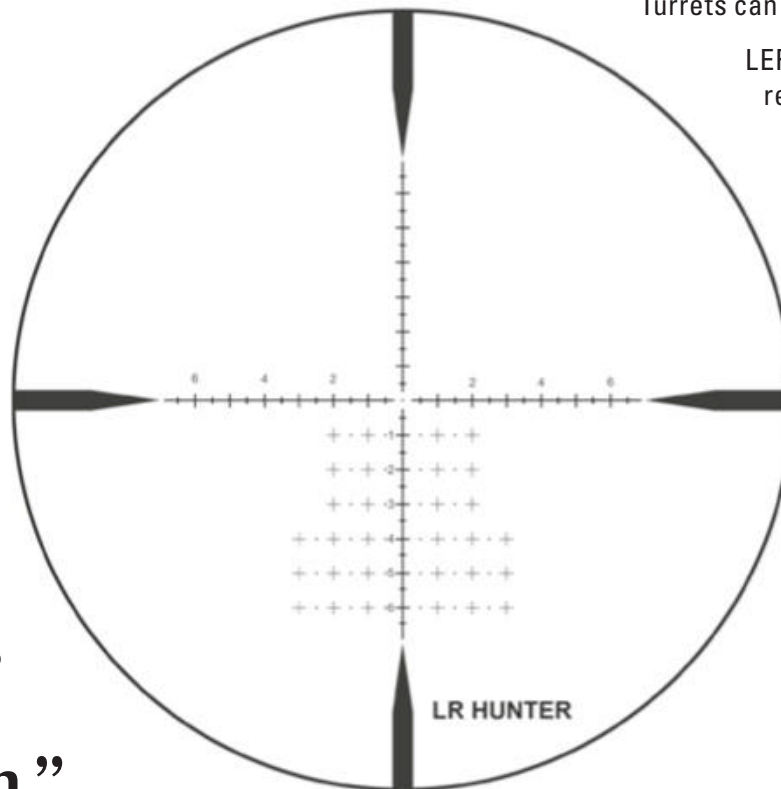
Aluminium flip-up lens covers are attached to each end of the scope but if you don't like them you can remove them. They are well made, fit precisely and I happily left them in place to help keep the lenses clean.

There are many reasons to like the Thrive HD 4-16x44 — everything from its low profile and respectably light weight through to the convenience of side-adjusted parallax and the great LR Hunter reticle. It has lots of features, not least of which is excellent optical clarity.

It is one of the most well-considered long-range hunting scopes you'll find, it's also fine for range work, and at just under \$1000 it's very attractively priced. 

FAR LEFT: Reticle and its adjustments are all in milliradians. Turrets can be re-set to zero.

LEFT: The LR Hunter reticle, mounted in the first focal plane, is detailed without being cluttered.



ZeroTech Thrive HD 4-16x44 IR

Reticle: Illuminated; first focal plane; LR Hunter; 0.1 MRAD clicks

Maximum adjustment: 36 MRAD

Parallax adjustment: 10m to infinity

Eye relief: 93mm

Lenses: Fully multi-coated

Objective lens diameter: 44mm

Main tube diameter: 30mm

Magnification: 4-16x

Field of view: 2.3-9.2m @ 100m

Exit pupil: 2.75-11mm

Light transmission: 92%

Length: 361mm

Weight: 653g

RRP: \$999

Distributor: TSA Outdoors, zerotech.com.au



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GUIDE BUCKET HAT

GUIDE LIGHTWEIGHT TOP

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Pecar Black Carbon 2.5-10x50 rifle scope

Looking for a top-notch hunting scope selling for well under \$1000? This Pecar has many desirable features and delivers performance way beyond its price.

PECAR is a name to reckon with. Back in the 1950s when I started hunting and writing, only a few high-quality scopes were being imported from Europe and the most popular carried the brand name Pecar-Berlin.

As well as fixed-powers, the Pecar-Berlin line included a pair of variables — there was a 3-7x40mm and a 4-10x50mm. Both had 26mm diameter steel tubes with reticles in the first focal plane. At that time they were the only scopes in the



ON THIS SPREAD

1 The 1/4 MOA adjustment clicks are clear and precise

2 The Pecar features fast-focus eye piece and a decent 89mm of eye relief

3 Exposed target-type turrets are available if you prefer them to capped ones

“

The Pecar features constant eye relief which is a good thing, especially on a hard-kicking rifle.”

world with a unique interchangeable reticle system.

As a testament to their rugged reliability: I had a 4-10x Pecar on a Brno ZG47 in .270 Winchester that I used for several seasons, roo shooting professionally. This scope stayed on the Brno through the lifetime of eight barrels and the firing of about 30,000 rounds without missing a beat.

A few years ago the Pecar factory in Germany closed, but fairly recently a Queensland company, Pro-Tactical, has

brought out a new line of riflescopes under the name of Pecar Optics.

The Black Carbon range covers four variables — a 1.5-6x42 (\$649); 2.5-10x50 (\$699); 3-12x56 (\$745); and 5-25x56 (\$1195), all with 30mm tubes of aircraft-quality alloy, anodised a dull matte black. Most feature a No 4 illuminated reticle in the second focal plane, the exception being the 5-15x56, which has a long-range type reticle in the first focal plane.

Every scope comes with a pair of interchangeable target turrets included.

Pecar is a name to live up to, so I was keen to find out how good the new line is. Pro-Tactical sent a Black Carbon 2.5-10x50mm attached to a Voere LBW rifle to put through its paces.

Having a length of 330mm and weighing 360g, the Pecar is more compatible with a trim hunting scope than many other high-range switch-power rifle scopes.

The 50mm objective and other lenses are fully multi-coated, which can brighten a picture at high magnification. The optics give fine resolution, excellent contrast, clarity and perfect colour balance. This working-class scope is big enough to yield a 5mm exit pupil at 10x, while allowing the use of medium-height rings on most rifles.

The ocular lens is 35mm in diameter, which not only allows long eye relief of 89mm, but an increased field of view in the 2.5-10x of (at 100m) 17m at 2.5x and 4.3m at 10x. The Pecar's large 50mm objective lens gives superior light transmission and mated to fully multi-coated lenses using Pecar's proprietary coatings, it provides a bright, sharp image.

Light transmission of the 2.5-10x is 88 percent.

All things being equal,



PRODUCT REVIEW

however, a scope's brightness is largely dependent on the size of its exit pupil, which is derived from the objective lens diameter divided by its magnification. The human eye is capable of only dilating 5-7mm, so any exit pupil greater than that is wasted light. An exit pupil of 5mm at 10x is a usable amount of light in most light conditions.

In really poor light conditions, the illuminated reticle glows red on demand. It features 11 levels of brightness and is powered by one CR2032 battery housed in the left turret.

Maximum adjustment is 30 MOA. Additionally, the Pecar features constant eye relief which is a good thing, especially on a hard-kicking

rifle. With some variables, particularly those with high magnification, eye relief can shrink up to an inch simply by dialling more magnification. With the Pecar you are not forced to crawl the stock as you zoom in and out.

Straight out of the box this affordable scope doesn't have the exposed elevation turret considered so essential by some of today's distance shooters. Turret caps afford protection from the elements — and from accidental adjustments to one's zero while in the field. This might give the impression that the Pecar is intended solely for basic hunters, who sight in their rifles and don't touch the elevation turret again because they almost never shoot beyond 300 metres.

That's all to the good, but Pecar supplies a set of interchangeable target turrets which replace the standard turrets in the event a shooter wants to indulge in long-range shooting. This a pious idea, since it expands the optic's usefulness

Swapping turrets is easy. It requires unscrewing each turret and threading on the target turrets, taking care to align the bar with a matching slot in the scope's adjustment mechanism. Dial to the correct mark and shoot.

The ¼ MOA clicks are crisp and clean and precise.

At the range, settling behind the rifle, I saw the image quality was bright and sharp. However, such things are frivolous if the scope doesn't track reliably. After shooting the square, starting in the centre of the target, and carefully shooting a three-shot group while adjusting windage and elevation, the Pecar came through with flying colours.

Shooting the square works fine when testing for a scope meant to be sighted-in and left alone because even if the

**4****5**

clicks don't measure as precisely as advertised (and some don't), as long as the point of impact moves the same amount with each click the scope can be zeroed relatively easily.

But this scope has extra windage and elevation turrets. The latter is designed to be run up and down, so the long-range shooter wants to know whether each click moves the point of impact precisely every time. Target shooters may be dialling up to more than 1000m, while hunters may be interested only in ranges up to 500m. But even at 'only' 500m, some loads require more than half a metre of elevation adjustment from a 100m zero.

Not having the time to test the elevation turret out to 1000m, I tested it against the grid in my collimator and found it would have given a perfectly straight, vertical line of shots.

Glass manufacturers and optical design continue to improve. The optical glass in Pecar scopes is Japanese. Many prestigious European scopes use Schott glass, but the same glass technology is used in Japan and is just as good. Purely

from a quality standpoint, the best optics coming out of Asia are superb, equal to those being made in Europe.

For most people, a power range of from 2.5x through 10x will take care of any hunting situation they will ever engage in. The 2.5x setting is ideal for heavy bush where shots will be no farther than 50m, and 10x is plenty of magnification for long shots on deer-size game.

Given its modest price of \$699, the Pecar Black Carbon 2.5-10x50 is within the budget of most shooters. For me, the cost is outweighed by the Pecar's many excellent features. At the factory, it undergoes shock-testing and is nitrogen purged and waterproof. All Pecars carry a 10-year guarantee.

For the average hunter, this scope represents a good buy. 

ON THIS PAGE

4 For a 2.5-10x50, the Pecar Black Carbon is respectably light and compact.

5 With a 50mm objective, the Pecar makes a nice compromise between light transmission and a low profile.



Pecar Black Carbon 2.5-10x50 IR

Manufacturer: Pro-Tactical

Reticle: Illuminated; second focal plane; German No 4; ¼ MOA clicks

Eye relief: 89mm

Lenses: Japanese; fully multi-coated

Main tube diameter: 30mm

Magnification: 2.5-10x

Field of view: 4.3-17m @ 100m

Exit pupil: 5-20mm

Length: 330mm

Weight: 360g

Maximum adjustment: 30 MOA

Diopter: +/- 2

Accessories: Target turrets, end covers, one CR2032 battery

RRP: \$699

Distributor: Pro-Tactical, protactical.com.au



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Once I'd been discharged and felt fit enough to go on my first hunt, the air never seemed so fresh."



Hunting and your health

Illness took Dylan down but fitness brought him back more quickly

In my writings over the past few years, I've outlined that hunting has a lot to do with health. Besides bringing home free-range meat for friends and family, the effort required to get it is often great exercise. I try to live my life in a way that allows me to hunt as much as possible so I can exercise without having to sacrifice hunting time, but I still like to go to the gym and watch my diet carefully as I believe it allows me to hunt harder and longer.

Recently, I had a health scare that put me in hospital for a little while and I had a lot of time to reflect on these thoughts.

No matter how healthy you are and how careful you are, there is always the chance that you could get sick beyond the means of your control. In my case, I had a large cyst full of Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) on my left kidney. In layman's terms, golden staph.

Besides the pain from the cyst in my lower back, the fevers were horrendous. It took over a week to diagnose as questions I answered about my lifestyle led the doctors down a path of chasing something related to killing

and processing wild animals. Once the cyst was found and drained, I was on IV antibiotics for two weeks.

Lying in a hospital bed for three weeks gave me plenty of time to think. Despite my best efforts of trying to pinpoint a cause for my illness, the doctors all told me that it was a total freak occurrence. This was hard for my ego to deal with as I struggle with the idea of not being able to prevent illness; I like to feel in control, but it's not always possible.

Having said this, the doctors all told me that my ability to fight the illness, and their ability to give me extremely high doses of antibiotics, was due to my level of health and fitness. It was also obvious that others I came across in hospital would have been fighting their battles a little easier if

they were healthier in the first place.

Once I'd been discharged and felt fit enough to go on my first hunt, the air never seemed so fresh.

I got very close to some pigs and even let an arrow fly but a combination of swirling wind and my lack of strength to shoot my bow effectively made it very tough. After walking the hills for several hours, I felt fantastic, but I was extremely tired the next day and had to take a couple of naps to recover.

Where am I going with all this? Don't take your health for granted. Get outside as much as you can. If you happen to get sick, recover at a pace that is comfortable for you.

Until next time, enjoy living your wilderlife. ☺

Follow Dylan on Instagram at *'_wilderlife_'*

ON THIS PAGE

1 Happy days again as Dylan gets back out hunting, albeit without his usual energy.

2 Dylan recovers in hospital.



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We should be celebrating hunting rather than gatekeeping over whether someone else is doing it ‘properly’.”

If you ask how to hunt properly,
are you are asking the wrong question?

The enemy within

IT’S fairly safe to say that most shooters enjoy hunting, would like to go hunting, or have friends that go hunting. Hunting is an activity that is as old as humankind, but it’s constantly under threat in Australia from several angles.

The obvious threat comes from the usual suspects in the form of strongly anti-hunting politicians and animal rights activists. We’re never going to win them over and there’s no point trying — as the saying goes, it’d be like mud-wrestling with a pig; you both end up covered in muck and the pig enjoys it.

Another major threat is perhaps the most insidious — the enemy within our ranks, particularly in-fighting between shooting organisations and hunters with different philosophies.

The best example of this is how to treat the many, many

deer roaming the wilds of eastern Australia and Tasmania. Are they majestic and noble game animals, to be stalked with care, deliberation, patience and quasi-reverence? Are they feral pests to be shot out of hand at any time of day or night, be it on foot, from the back of a ute or even out of a helicopter?

Make sure you don’t fire-proof protective equipment before expressing an opinion one way or the other on the issue on the internet! No matter which side you take, lots of people are going to be upset and it makes it very hard to have meaningful discussion about the issue when shooters — who can agree that venison is very tasty — are fighting over something that’s really secondary to the wider issues at play.

We should be celebrating a shared enjoyment of Australia’s

natural heritage, the outdoors and hunting rather than gatekeeping over whether someone else is doing it ‘properly’ — as long as it’s being done legally and humanely. After all, regardless of whether you hunt with a gun, bow or dogs, please remember: We’re all hunters, together.

Perhaps the most serious threat to hunting isn’t the most immediately obvious, however — and that’s the lack of places for new or less involved hunters to actually go hunting in the first place.

Yes, if you’re in NSW or Victoria you’ve got access to a lot of public land in state forests and the like for hunting, but in most of the rest of the country, if you don’t have a friend or family member with a rural property, or you don’t pay for access, you are out of luck.

It’s absurd that you can’t go

hunting on crown or state land in the majority of states, given the vast, vast amount of uninhabited land in Australia.

If you’ve spent any time at all in shooting discussion groups, you’ve heard new shooters outside the states with public land hunting lamenting they’ve got nowhere to hunt because of this lack of access — which means hunting is increasingly only for the well-connected, the cashed up, or members of good hunting clubs.

If we really want to protect hunting (and we do!) then we need to put aside our differences regarding the One True Way of Hunting and focus on presenting a united front — and ensuring that all hunters have access to land on which to pursue our calling.

The more people we get hunting, the harder it is for the antis to restrict it or shut it down — and the more people we have enjoying Australia’s wonderful outdoors, supporting rural areas and protecting our natural heritage, too. 🇦🇺

Graham Park is the president of Shooters Union Australia

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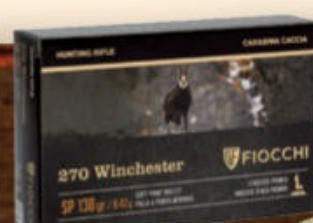
 Peter Roulston went for an evening hunt with his son. "Just after dark we saw this pig come out of the rainforest, about 600m away. He slowly made his way towards us as we closed the distance through the paddock. As he came out of the gully I got a shot from about 150m." Nice work, Peter!

 Peter Hayes lined up this beaut shot of his workmate, Jackson, with a big dingo he shot on the run from the timber behind in the pic. "Driving through the cut line in the timber in the buggy, Paul saw the dog watching us, stopped, and Jackson jumped out. The dog was by then running flat out in the timber trying to escape. When the dog hit the open paddock, Jackson shot from 30m inside the timber, knowing the dog would outrun him. It was about a 130m shot. The dog did a big summersault and was dead before he hit the ground. Jackson let out a big yahoo!

"The property owner was very happy and asked whether it was a gold or black colour, as he has seen both. "Good old Fiocchi ammo does the job in Jacko's .243."

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going towards where I thought pigs might come from. I stood on the highest bank hoping my scent might stay high. This old boar came casually walking out of the long grass for a drink — walked past me below the

dam wall only 10 metres away. I thought to myself, my shout for a drink mate, but gave him a Fiocchi bullet instead. Dropped on the spot!"

Paul weighed the big fella and it came in at 100.2kg, a true tonner.



"Back from the Cape and just spent seven hours cleaning my Hilux ute," Ball Paul says. "It was a great trip with great friends.

"I was waiting at a dam one afternoon. The wind was terrible,

Georgia Howell knocked over this pig with her .223 on a hunt out west that included a varied bunch of ferals.



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



The journey is the trophy

Scott McCahon's first stag was a long time in coming

STAG down. That was my short but excited text to family back in Far North Queensland as I reflected on a blur of actions on a cold, overcast day atop a ridge in the magnificent Victorian High Country.

But this is the climax of what is a much longer story. To appreciate the thrill of this moment, I need to go back four years in time.

The journey started when I accepted a job offer from a professional colleague. We discovered a combined appreciation of all things outdoors. In particular, he was a passionate hunter with an obsession for sambar deer. Living in FNQ, I only ever had the chance to read and dream about hunting sambar.

With a contact in place and drooling over photos of heavily antlered stags, I hatched a plan for the following year. Enter COVID-19, a curse to all, but particularly those who travel for work or pleasure. It was on, it was off, it was on ... finally, it was off!

Okay, next year...

Anticipation high, I made it to sambar country.



Four years of anticipation came down to one clean shot from the .338.

Magnificent landscapes and friendly locals greeted me. Despite COVID still creating havoc, the devastating bushfires from the previous year were the rawest thing. Over 12 months on and the physical scars on the land were still plainly visible. I could sense the scars on the memories of the locals as they described the horror of seeing houses erupt in flame, the sounds and sights forever etched in their minds.

The resilience of the Australian bush struck me as I hunted hard over many days. New life was springing from totally blackened tree stumps, but this dense under-foliage only added to the challenge of the hunt. Deer signs were

evident — fresh wallows, tracks — but my only contact was a fleeting glimpse of a russet rear end as a hind crashed away into the impenetrable scrub.

So we returned to the bracken and blackberry of the mountain top, where finally after several fruitless days of stalking I was startled by the ear-shattering honk of a sambar. Until you actually hear this sound it is hard to fully appreciate. A tense 15-minute standoff ensued, which included two more honks, then the head and neck of the stag materialised not 40 metres away.

A clean single shot from the .338 secured a trophy that I will long remember. 🎯

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The doomed .35



The .35 calibre has been a failure since day one. Why? Does it deserve its fate?

THE .35 family ranges from pipsqueaks to powerhouses capable of reliably stopping the largest and most dangerous of the world's big game. The majority flourished for only a brief time before becoming obsolete. Three notable exceptions were the .35 Remington, the .35 Whelen and .358 Winchester, but they're barely surviving, suffering from lack of interest and having few adherents.

The .35 saga began in 1903 with the introduction of the .35 Winchester, developed for the Model 1895 lever-action rifle. Both the cartridge and rifle lasted only until 1936.

The .35 WSL (Winchester Self Loading) was introduced in 1905 for the Winchester Model '05 semi-auto rifle. The round was badly underpowered, driving a 180gn bullet at around

1440fps. By 1920 it had been replaced with a more powerful round, the .351 WSL, which boosted velocity with a 180gn bullet to 1850fps. The .351 WSL enjoyed a few decades of popularity before being dropped in 1957.

The .35 Remington was introduced in 1906 for use in the Remington Model 8 semi-auto, Remington's response to the more powerful .35 Winchester. Despite having the rather modest velocity of 2225fps with a 200gn bullet, the .35 Rem earned the reputation for being a good woods rifle and a reliable killer of deer and black bear. Rather surprisingly, 115 years later, the .35 Remington is still being chambered in the Henry Side-Gate lever-action and the Marlin 336.

The .35 Newton appeared in 1915. Based on the .30 Newton case necked up to .35 calibre,

it offered ballistics similar to the modern .358 Norma Magnum — 250gn at 2790fps. Although it was no slouch power-wise, it barely managed to survive until 1936.

The .350 Griffin & Howe, a full blown magnum based on the .375 H&H case necked down to .35, came along in the early 1930s. A darn good cartridge, it launched 250gn bullets at 3050fps, but its tenure was even shorter and it too faded away by the end of the 1930s.

The .35 Whelen surfaced during the 1920s and was the first of three efforts by Griffin & Howe to produce a cartridge that would equal the .350 Rigby with a 310gn bullet on thin skinned game. The .35 Whelen racked up a tremendous record on the largest species of big game and won a reputation for being one

of the best balanced and most flexible medium bores for North American hunting.

Simply the .30-06 case necked up with no other change, the cartridge's popularity fluctuated up and down until Remington made it a legitimate factory round in 1987. It has set no sales records and is barely hanging on in this age of super magnums.

One of the finest .35s, if not the best, the .358 Norma Magnum (a modern version of the .350 Griffin & Howe) made its debut in 1959. Driving a 250gn bullet at 2900fps, it was a real powerhouse, a short magnum-type cartridge designed to work through standard-length actions. The .358 Norma was reliable and effective and gained a reputation for knocking Swedish moose and other heavy game dead in heavy cover.

It could best be described as a .375 H&H shooting a slightly smaller bullet, but although it offered similar performance to the .375, few rifles were made for it and the Norma soon became obsolete.

Introduced in 1955 for the Winchester Model 70 and lever-action Model 88 rifles, the .358 Winchester, like the .35 Remington, is a survivor. Based

ON THIS SPREAD

1 Some .35s past and present, from left: .350 Legend, .35 Remington, .358 Winchester, .35 Whelen, .358 Norma Magnum and .35 Griffin & Howe.

2 The newest .35 cartridge is the .350 Legend, made by necking up the .223 Remington case. It's a good low-recoil, close-range cartridge.

3 The Marlin 336 is being chambered for the .35 Remington, which is still popular with American deer hunters despite being 115 years old.

on the .308 Win case simply necked up, it's one of the best non-magnum .35s of them all. A marginal round for elk and moose, the .358 is adequate for deer and black bear. It made its reputation in lever-action woods rifles like the Savage Model 99 and Winchester 88 and today is still being chambered in the Browning BLR, but sees only limited use.

In 1965 Remington introduced the .350 Remington Magnum in the Model 600 bolt-action carbine with a stubby 18" barrel, which was lengthened to 20" in the later Model 660 Magnum carbine. It was also chambered in the Remington Model 700 and later Model 673 Guide Rifle (based on the Model Seven action) as well as the Ruger M77. The .350 Rem Mag duplicates the .35 Whelen in a short, fat belted case.

Les Bowman swore by the .350 Rem Mag with the 200gn factory load, which churned up 2860fps and 3650ft-lb for its close-in stopping power on brown bears.

When Remington attempted to reintroduce its .350 in 2002 I found the case awkward to reload with heavy bullets as they had to be seated deeply, reducing powder capacity substantially more than in the longer-necked .35 Whelen. It would have been

no surprise if its unpleasant recoil in a light rifle helped hurry the .350 Remington into early retirement.

The latest, though not the greatest, is the .350 Legend, a purposefully designed short-range cartridge for deer hunters in America's closely settled eastern states. It's a straight-walled cartridge with a rebated rim and overall length of 2.25" based on the .223 Remington case. Intended for use out to 200yd, five different factory loads accompanied the launch of the .350 Legend; probably the best hunting load is the Super-X Deer Season 150gn XP at 2290fps from a 22" barrel.

The .350 Legend is capable of sub-MOA accuracy, and is gaining a footing with Aussie hog hunters.

Ackley's *Handbook* lists over a dozen .35-calibre wildcats, none of which progressed far beyond the experimental stage. A more recent wildcat, the .358 STA (Shooting Times Alaskan) was whumped up by US gun writer Layne Simpson, who in 1990 simply necked up the 8mm Rem Mag case. In 1994 A-Square chambered for an improved version with reduced body taper and a sharper shoulder. Its ballistics were most impressive, but



“

The .35 Whelen won a reputation for being one of the best balanced and most flexible medium bores.”

alas, it suffered the same fate as lesser .35s.

No treatise on the .35s would be complete without mention of Ted Mitchell's .35 Mitchell Express, an Aussie wildcat based on the 8x57mm case necked up and fire-formed to have a 40-degree shoulder. The 200gn Atomic 29 and Barnes 225gn TSX bullets are driven at 2750fps, which compares favourably with the .358 Norma's 250gn bullet at 2790fps. In Ted's hands this wildcat .35 has accounted for a swag of game including buffaloes.

The .35 calibre's lack of popularity today couldn't be attributed to any lack of good bullets because now there is a decent range of bullet weights and types suited for a variety of game. Most brands are limited in number, but Woodleigh lists eight different bullets weighing

from 225gn to 310gn in both soft point and FMJ, with their sectional densities and ballistic coefficients.

Sectional density (SD) — weight in relation to diameter — has a relatively minor influence on the required twist, although it is commonly believed otherwise. This thinking is brought about because most high-SD bullets in common use are rather long as compared with their diameters and this is the greatest single factor contributing to deep and reliable penetration. SD is also one of the chief determining factors in a bullet's ability to overcome air resistance; bullets with a high SD demonstrate a reluctance to shed their velocity.

A bullet's SD is determined by dividing its weight (in pounds) by its diameter (in inches). In the American

2



system the weight of bullets is expressed in grains, one grain of weight being one seven-thousandths of a pound. Thus, to reduce grains to pounds, the weight in grains must be divided by 7000. The bullet's diameter is taken to be its unfired diameter or, more correctly, the groove diameter of the barrel from which it is to be fired.

The second important factor which determines a bullet's ability to retain its velocity is expressed by a figure known as the 'form factor'. The product of the form factor and sectional density is known as the ballistic coefficient. A bullet having a long, tapered nose, a sharp point and a boat-tail will have excellent ranging quality relative to its SD.

Most .35-calibre cartridges are loaded with relatively blunt bullets which, together with the lack of varied factory loads for them, may account for the calibre's generally low level of popularity. The full range of performance of a .35-calibre cartridge is available only to the handloader, which certainly reduces the number of prospective users.

A useful analysis of the .35s should be based on the merits of each according to size accompanied by meaningful comparison of their field performance. There are several .35 cartridges that are appropriate for thickly wooded areas, and best suited for the needs of the sambar hunter. A .35 is more likely to put down a big stag at 50yd in heavy cover than many of the smaller calibres currently seeing use.

The .35 Whelen was designed partially as a more economical substitute for the .375 H&H, since rifles for it used inexpensive .30-06 length actions rather than costly magnum Mauser actions. Another selling point: the rimless brass doesn't require



In heavy cover or on big game, there's no denying that they are reliable and effective."

opening up the bolt face or action rails and is easier and cheaper to manufacture than belted brass. This was a narrow niche and the Whelen filled it for a while, but time marches on and 21st Century hunters are more magnum-minded so .35 Whelen seems the relic of a past age.

With a stout 250gn bullet at 2600fps it is capable of taking most species of big game, but it looks like becoming obsolete. This is passing strange when you consider that the 1905-era 9.3x62mm, which is broadly similar to the .35 Whelen in dimension and performance, but only marginally more powerful, remains popular worldwide. This could be due to all the excellent bullets the Germans load it with.

It cannot be said that the .35s have the spectacular qualities of higher velocity rounds, but in heavy cover or on big game, there's no

denying that they are reliable and effective. The late Colonel Charles Askins was satisfied with the performance of a Savage Model 99 in .358 Winchester on a variety of Indo-Chinese game, including banteng and gaur.

By my rule of thumb, there are three levels of .35-calibre cartridges. My first pick of a .35 for all-round use would be the .358 Win in the lightweight Browning BLR, which has a 20" barrel and fast handling qualities, ample killing power and penetration, and light enough recoil to effectively meet most hunting requirements.

My second level would be a bolt-action chambered for the .35 Whelen, the most underrated of all the .35s. It is perfectly adequate for all Aussie game, even buffalo at a pinch, but only if the bullet is preferably a solid and well-placed. Sadly, there's no factory rifle for it now since even Remington seems to have dropped it. Hunters who want a rifle chambered for the versatile and relatively economical .35 Whelen will either have to go custom or re-barrel an existing rifle.

My third level is a cartridge that has languished in popular acceptance, the powerful .358 Norma Magnum — the big Swede. A standard-length belted cartridge, it is suited to any action that will accept the .30-06. It first appeared in the

Husqvarna Series 4100 and Schultz & Larsen Model 65 but its failure to become popular did not hinge entirely on the limited choice of Scandinavian rifles; a contributing factor was undoubtedly that it was a proprietary cartridge, similar in concept to the Weatherby line of belted magnums. Another factor was, without question, the scarcity and high price of both unprimed brass and ammunition.

Another negative: At the time of its introduction, there was a lack of good .35-calibre high-velocity big-game bullets designed expressly for .358 Norma-class terminal ballistics.

All this conspired against the .358 Norma Magnum gaining more popularity and becoming universally accepted. Up until the .358 Norma Magnum appeared, the .35 Whelen represented the upper velocity range of common .35s, around 2600fps with 200gn bullets and 2400fps with heavier 250 grainers. The big Swede was capable of pushing 200gn bullets at 3100fps and getting 2800fps from factory-loaded 250gn Dual-Cores, designed expressly to withstand Norma-class terminal ballistics.

The .358 Norma is an extremely useful cartridge. It stands head and shoulders above the current welter of dead and dying cartridges in this calibre, and could well be put to broader use. It deserves greater popularity among the shooting fraternity. It is a well-designed and versatile cartridge which meets the criterion for an all-round medium-bore rifle, and I'd like to see it revived.

It has a lot of good features: it burns less powder, has less recoil, and is less expensive than any of the oversized super magnums. In my book the .358 Norma Magnum is richly deserving of a second chance. 



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CUSTOM RIFLES



A large fallow buck with impressive antlers is lying on the ground in a forest. The antlers are large and multi-tined, with a brown, textured appearance. The buck's head is in the lower left, and its body extends towards the center. The background is a dense forest with green foliage and tree trunks.

Without much effort, Dylan Smith
has built his ideal hunting weapon.

Making a mountain rifle

I like to think I've kept enough rifles in my safe over the years to cover most bases. The problem is, the more you hunt and the more you desire different rifles for specific applications, the more you see gaps that need filling.

MAIN: A big fallow buck taken deep in the mountains.

FOR me, the 9.3x62 cartridge makes sense for a mountain rifle in a sambar context, but my FN 98 is far too big for walking up and down mountains for days. At the other end, my only stainless/synthetic rifle was in .308 and I felt like something with a bit more power behind it was a better fit for my hunting needs. For these reasons, I lusted after a .300 Winchester Magnum.

This story isn't one of flicking through websites and catalogues and weighing up the pros and cons of different rifle models. I already knew which rifle I wanted; my friend had an original Sako A7 in .300 Win Mag that had sat in his safe unused after he'd bought a .270. He also bought a new scope, so the Swarovski Z3 3-10x42mm on the Sako was staying put.

I'd used this rifle a couple of times while hunting with my friend and knew it was perfectly suited to what I wanted to do with it. It had also taken close to 200 deer in southern NSW and north-eastern Victoria and I was excited to continue the legacy of it being a serious rifle for a serious hunter who wanted to put meat in the freezer.

I was fortunate that my friend gave me a heap of cases for the rifle so I could start reloading right away. Some 150gn Hornady Interlocks were lying around in my projectile case and I decided it'd be fun to use them on some of my quarry in my usual spots. I'm not one for crunching numbers with cartridges and ballistics but I knew these bullets would be going very fast and flat to make for easy shooting on light game in my area.

It didn't take long to get them



“

There's only so much abuse a stock can take.”

shooting inside 1.5 MOA, so I started hunting.

After shooting a few pigs to feel confident in the rifle, I was keen to take it out during the fallow rut. I'd gained access to a new spot with some serious mountain country so I felt confident I could stretch out if the need arose. It was a good time of year to hear the bucks. I parked my car and started walking in the direction of croaks.

I saw a few younger deer, all in

shootable spots, but it was far too early in the hunt for me to want to end it and not see all the property had to offer. By mid-morning I was hiking to get a look at one final buck I could hear croaking. He was in thick brush and I was making my way down from above him. I saw a flash of antlers as he rounded up some does.

I raised my binos, quickly concluding he was a shooter. I aimed the rifle and made a very





4

ON THIS SPREAD

1 Rifle and backpack. Maiden trip with the new carbon Hi-Tec stock.

2 Communicating with family at home is nice during backpack trips.

3 The first two shots with the rifle after fitting the new Hi-Tec carbon stock.

4 Dylan with the beautiful fallow buck taken with his mountain rifle

5 A pack full of meat and antlers ready for the hike out of the mountains.

quick shot as I caught a glimpse of him moving between the bushes. He fell.

The closer I got to him, the bigger he appeared. It was a complete fluke to get such a monster on my first morning at the property. This one will remain my best fallow buck for a very long time.

It felt fantastic to get a trophy that the rifle was worthy of. Despite having the legs to make some long shots, the scope on 3x and the balance of the rifle allowed me to handle it very quickly when needed. A rifle you can swing like that makes you ooze confidence.

The Interlock performed as expected; I shot the deer on a quartering-away angle so it travelled through a lot of material. I found the cup of the bullet and shards of lead that resembled corn flakes inside his off-side shoulder. He was killed emphatically but I always knew that I would want to look at a bullet that was constructed more appropriately for a magnum of this style, as even though fallow are my regular quarry, I intended to use this rifle to hunt sambar as much as possible.

Having had a lot of experience



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with Woodleigh projectiles in my .308 and my 9.3x62, there was no way I was going to consider anything but the PPSN. Besides being brilliantly constructed projectiles that I'd used to take many pigs, goats, deer, brumbies and some scrubbers, I always like to support Australian-made when I can.

I got onto Anthony from NT Firearms in Gove and sourced some 180gn projectiles in both the regular and magnum versions and made up some reloads with them. I was

pleased that the point of impact of both projectiles was close enough that I wouldn't need to adjust the scope between my choices.

I took a handful of the magnum-projectile handloads with me the first time I took this rifle into Victoria, because sambar are bigger than anything else I chase up my way and I wanted a stout bullet. However, the hunt turned out to be a glorified bushwalk. The rifle copped all the weather Victorians are familiar with.

I took a few meat animals with this rifle and bullet combination but the first opportunity I had to take a nice trophy was the end of the fallow rut of 2021. I'd walked around the hills to no avail with my recurve bow for close to a week and had to stop my search as I needed to get home to get married. After spending our honeymoon looking for deer, when my wife bagged a nice meat animal, I took the .300 WM out in search of a buck for myself.

On my last morning of hunting, I passed up a good deer at first light. Through the morning I passed up many other bucks before circling

back to get the first one. He presented a stiff quartering-on shot and I hit him right through the point of his on-side shoulder. The bullet stopped in front of his off-side hip and weighed 147gn. That performance is perfect, in my view.

I didn't use the rifle much after this hunt as the original synthetic stock was starting to deteriorate. There's only so much abuse a stock can take. I think my sweat and sunscreen may have had a lot to do with it. Every time I pulled the rifle out of the safe after things started going south, I was demotivated to hunt with it. I

finally decided to do something about it and bought a carbon stock from Hi-Tec in New Zealand.

These stocks are a premium piece of gear and the price reflects this. The lines are superb, it's built like a tank and, while being a lot stronger than the original stock, it's a hell of a lot lighter.

I tracked down a local gunsmith and had them fit the action into the stock properly and ensure the recoil lug was secure — a simple but necessary job. I wanted to be confident that everything would hold together, as it's a decent cartridge to have on such a light platform.

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When I held it in my hands it was as if the rifle had been transformed. The stock felt bigger but was much lighter and stiffer. The palm swell was spot on. I got home and put a target out at 90 yards and let two shots go. A couple of inches high and roughly half an inch apart.

I'm not a precision rifleman and when I reload, I only aim for hunting accuracy, but I was stoked that I didn't have to touch my scope and didn't bother with a third shot.

Friends of mine who own these stocks told me I would feel less recoil in spite of the lighter weight and I'm

pleased to say they were correct.

It was time to go hunting again.

The rifle was bought with sambar in mind, so it was fitting that the first hunt after a facelift was a backpack mission deep into Victoria. The rifle was a pleasure to carry up and down the big mountains — no surprises there. I don't normally stress over getting a rifle as light as possible, but it was nice to have something that carried this well when I was packing out heavy loads of sambar meat. In those situations, every gram makes a difference.

The only shot I took was a quick one. Grabbing the rifle and

immediately feeling that palm swell brought on instant poise.

The idea of a mountain rifle can mean different things to many people. For me, I focus as much as possible on my hunting skills and tend to let the minor details of my gear take a back seat, even though I do consider myself a gear head. Even though I haven't hunted extensively with it in its new configuration, there is little doubt in my mind that this rifle is going to serve me for many years in the big mountains where light weight, shootability, pointability and hard-hitting cartridges are essential. 🎯

ON THIS SPREAD

6 The first animal Dylan took with the freshly facelifted rifle was this sambar.

7 A recovered 180gn Woodleigh PPSN from a fallow buck. Perfect performance.

8 It's always good to find evidence of deer in the mountains.

“

When I held it in my hands it was as if the rifle had been transformed.”





Sambar double

Tony Pizzata makes up for missed opportunities by taking two sambar on his latest High Country hunt.

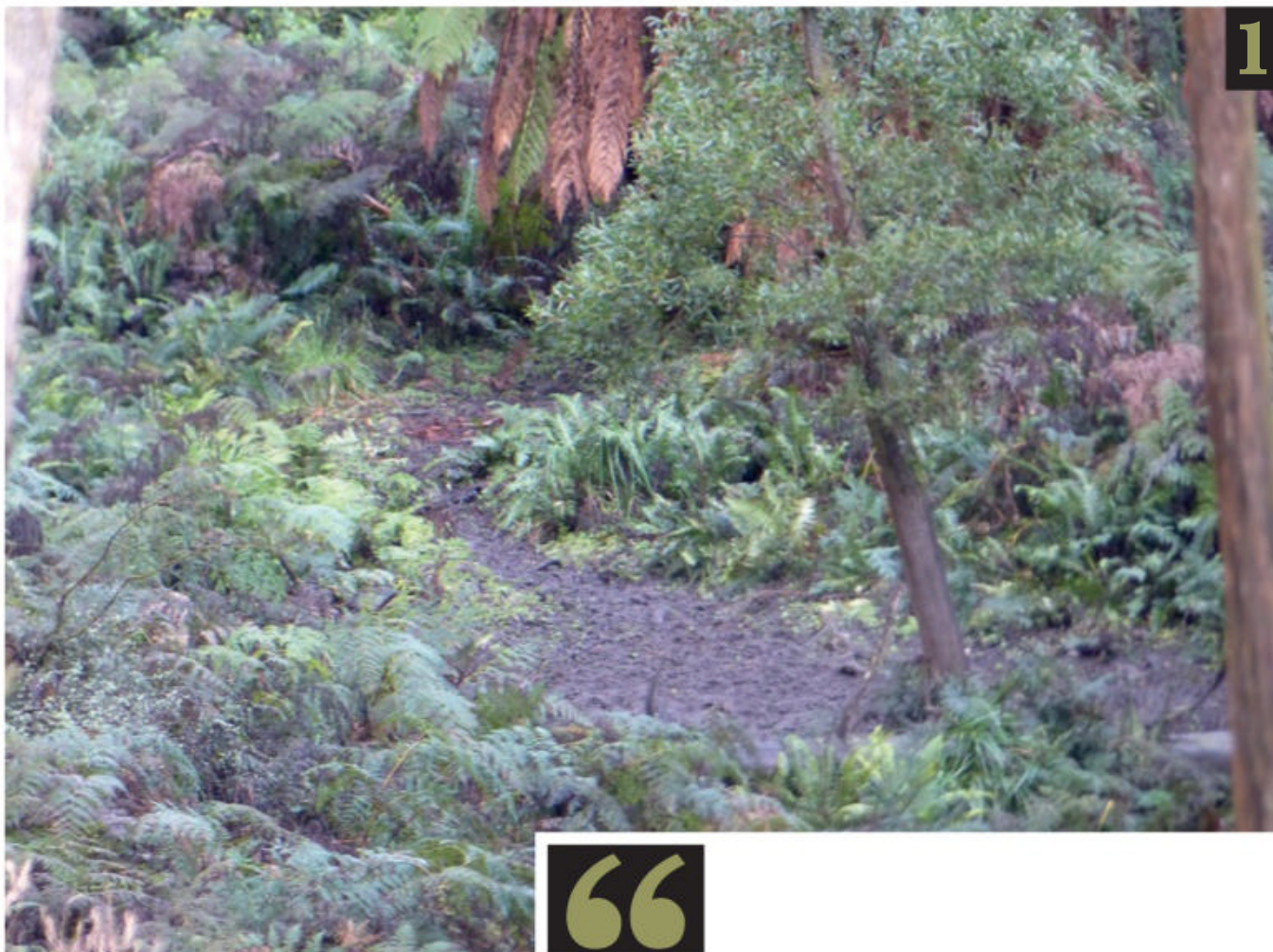
My countless trips to the Victorian High Country for sambar have mainly resulted in nothing more than a continued learning curve for me. Sure, I'd taken the odd one for meat and a couple of mediocre stags after many years of hunting them but the going was tough. Where I hunt them, the hills are steep and the bush extremely thick, so the deer see or hear me before I see them.

MAIN: A rare success! Tony and his sambar stag.

ABOVE: A hind poses briefly for the camera as she is caught in the open.







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It haunted me, not knowing just how good the shot was and exactly where I'd hit him.”

BEING honked at is a bitter-sweet experience that livens your senses very quickly.

That said, I've learned to slow down, look, listen and be patient, which can pay dividends.

My friend David phoned me in late July to let me know they'd received a good dump of snow, which had brought the sambar down low. There were a few about. I knew this didn't necessarily mean success, but I had a few days of leave from the office so I decided to head down for the physical exercise and experience, if nothing else.

David lives right in the middle of good sambar habitat. Sometimes there are rubs in his back yard when the odd stag decides to venture down to the fruit trees. But more so, they are in the hills around him and tend to only venture into the open country at night. He'd done some scouting prior to my arrival, as he normally takes the dog for a walk every day, and said he'd seen plenty of fresh sign in the hills.

The first morning was cold. The tops surrounding our hunting area were covered in a layer of snow and the open fringe country covered in a heavy frost. Leaving

the vehicle, we grabbed our packs and rifles and began the steep climb to higher country.

The odd fresh track confirmed there were deer about, but to this day I'd never been successful with sambar on the first outing. It always took a few days of settling in before success, if any showed up at all.

A little further on, Dave cut the tracks of a stag, but who knows where it might be by now?

“Keep an eye out,” Dave whispered. “I can smell him.”

Stopping briefly to glass ahead, we searched for any sign of movement. Shortly after, we moved on and kept climbing steadily. Suddenly Dave's dog came to a halt and looked ahead intently. Dave and I caught a glimpse of movement 80 metres up front. Freezing in our tracks, we waited, until Dave motioned me to move forward on my own for a look.

ON THIS PAGE

1 Waiting and watching over this wallow seemed like a good plan but didn't bring results.

2 Tony removes the stag's cape. The animal was in prime condition and will make an excellent wall mount.

At best, I thought it may have been a hind, but as I moved forward a little further I caught a glimpse of its huge, dark body. I couldn't see antlers through the scrub, but the giveaway was the size of its neck compared to that of a hind's slender shape. In that instant, I knew it was a stag of some description.

The realisation sent the shakes through my body, a feeling most deer hunters experience and refer to as the fever — buck fever.

Rifle at the ready, I slowly sneaked forward. I could now see the top of a tree swaying vigorously and knew he was rubbing. As I rounded the side of the hill below him, the movement stopped. The scrub was so thick, I'd lost my bearing on exactly where he was. Looking desperately for any sign of movement up in that general direction, I could see a dark brown object under a bush, but couldn't make out legs or neck.

“Is it just a stump or fallen log in the shade?” I wondered silently.

Turning to Dave, I saw his expression and lips distinctly mouthing, “Shoot!”

Shouldering the rifle, I looked again through the scope and that's when a slight flicker of the ears and head through the bush confirmed it was indeed him. Taking the shot at about 80 metres

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“

Deer will travel surprising quickly at last light, almost at a trot to get to where they're feeding.”

offhand, I connected. The stag lurched forward and gingerly galloped off.

The bush was too thick for a follow-up shot, so we sat and waited a while to let him bed down and expire. It haunted me, not knowing just how good the shot was and exactly where I'd hit him, but his body language when running off was reassuring. Added to that, we had Eddie, Dave's dog, to help find him.

Twenty minutes later we headed up to where the stag was hit and tried to follow his marks or a blood trail. Reaching the rub tree, it was evident he wasn't on his own as we found several fresh beds just over the rise where other deer had been settled for the day. Dave soon found the stag's tracks but no blood, which indicated he may have been hit high.

While Dave and Eddie followed the track, I decided to head up a little higher in case the stag was still up and decided to break cover.

To cut a long story short, Eddie found him. The stag was down with nowhere to go but still moving, so we finished him off. The work now began and after taking the cape, antlers and some dog meat, we headed off.

On another day, Dave and I headed out for an afternoon hunt in a different area. The plan was to sit over a couple of well-used wallows in the hope a stag might venture through. The area resembled a rainforest, with a creek running through it, plenty of green pick and lots of low-lying cover for deer. Sitting there patiently until just before dark, nothing eventuated so we headed back.

Following a well-worn track that would eventually take us back to the vehicle below, Dave and I moved slowly in the hope that we might be lucky enough to bump something on the way out.

Stopping to gather our thoughts for a moment, we heard movement from just above.

ON THIS PAGE

3 Some of the spoils of the hunt.

4 Tony's second kill, a tasty hind that provided good haul of tender meat.

Deer will travel surprising quickly at last light, almost at a trot to get to where they're feeding for the night. I've witnessed this on many occasions.

In moments a hind appeared in an opening, seemingly from nowhere, and stood broadside some 50 metres distant. We were already at a standstill with the wind in our favour, so she didn't even know we were there. Slowly, I shouldered the rifle. She must have picked up my movement but it was far too late as I squeezed the trigger, sending a 162gn Hornady Interlock from the 7mm Rem Mag in her direction.

The deer went down instantly. After a few quick photos, Dave and I got to work to retrieve as much meat as we could carry out before darkness arrived.

It just goes to show that when you're deer hunting, most times you're only out for a walk and the experience but sometimes a plan can come together. 🎯

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BLACKBUCK, BULLS AND BUFF





Brett Beesley pursues a variety of game with a range of rifles during a week's hunting in the Territory.

Scotch, blackback and bulls

I could hardly believe it had been over 12 months since my last hunt at Mary River Station. How time flies! This time I was after a blackback antelope, scrub bulls and a cull buffalo. Kevin told me that he didn't have any big trophy blackback left as the dingoes had taken a heavy toll on them, and there were only a few bucks left that were worth shooting. That was fine as an average-sized buck would do me, I assured him.



ARRIVING late on a Friday evening after a three-day drive, I found Kevin already had a new ramp made for me to be able to get into the house in my wheelchair. It wasn't long until I was perched up at the bar with a scotch on ice in my hand, catching up with Kevin and Carol and meeting Craig, my guide for a few days.

In the morning, on my Polaris X2 and with Craig on Kevin's quad, we did the short ride down the track to the blackbuck paddock. Some people may scoff at hunting 'behind wire' but when the paddock is bigger than some whole properties people hunt on, you soon discover there are lots of places animals hide in.

We rode through and stopped on a small rise to glass some open areas. Craig spotted a herd of blackbuck does bedded down in the shade. We sat watching them for a bit, trying unsuccessfully to locate the buck, then decided to make our way slowly towards them. We had barley ridden 300m when a mature buck jumped up right in front of us at no more than 50m.

"I think that's him!" said Craig.

"You sure?" I asked as I grabbed my rifle from the shooting rack.

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure," was the reply. By now I had the rifle shouldered and was checking out the buck through the scope.

"He looks big enough to me," I said to Craig.

The buck was slowly angling away from us as we continued to ask ourselves if this was the right one or not. Eventually he walked out of sight among some rocks.

"What do you reckon we back out of here, trying not to spook him, and we go have a look about?" asked Craig. "If we don't see anything bigger then we know where he is."

"Yeah, that was my thoughts, too," I replied.

So as quietly as possible we poked off in the other direction. For the next two hours or more we found a few different mobs of antelope but none of them held a mature buck.

"That first one we saw this morning is definitely the one we are after," said Craig. "Let's head back to that area and see if we can find him."

Well, for several hours we poked about the place but no matter where we looked we couldn't find him.

After lunch we were straight back out to have another crack. Riding down the road slowly for

ON THIS SPREAD

1 Brett's quad is set up to ensure he can get his rifle into action quickly and accurately.

2 Three magnificent trophy buffalo on Mary River Station. They weren't on Brett's hunting menu this time.

3 Brett with his blackbuck antelope, taken with his .240 Weatherby Magnum.



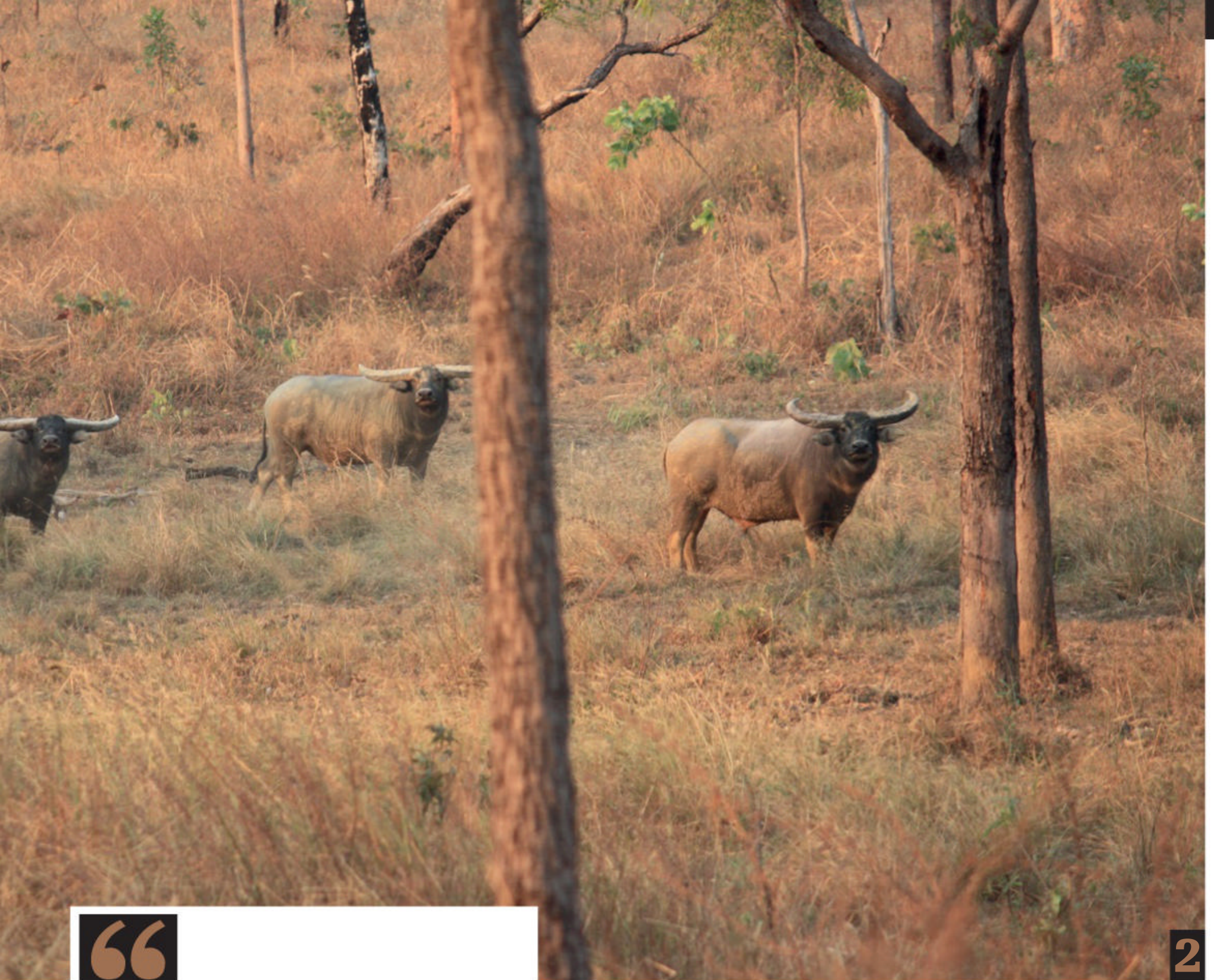
about 10 minutes, Craig was just in front of me when he stopped and pointed to the left. I instantly reached for my rifle but the wary little critter took off into the thick scrub. We decided to sit there for a while and let the high-strung buck settle down a bit.

I suggested we ride around to the left of where he'd run, as I had a feeling he would try to double back in that direction.

"Worth a try," Craig agreed.

At a snail's pace we both poked the noisy machines through a thick patch of scrub and Craig spotted the buck heading in our direction about 300m to the right. It stopped in a patch of long grass and light bush with its head just visible, and then lay down so we couldn't see it at all.

Over an hour later and we still hadn't seen him move so we decided Craig would stand on the back of my bike and we would ride



“

We got right up to where the blackbuck was and, lo and behold, he wasn't there!”

straight at him and see what happened. Closer and closer I rode towards where he lay and yet he still didn't stand. We got right up to where he was and, lo and behold, he wasn't there!

“What the hell!” was all I could say. “Where'd he go?”

Both Craig and I had been watching the area but somehow the buck managed to sneak off. I kept on slowly riding for a few hundred metres when Craig tapped me on the head and pointed to the buck standing in a clearing 50m away, looking at us.

I seized my rifle, placed the crosshairs centre of his chest and





“

touched the trigger of my .240 Why Mag. The buck took off in a mad dash to the left.

“Did I miss?” I asked, though I was sure it was a good shot.

“Nah, mate, you smacked him good!” Craig said.

I was told these little blighters where tough, but this fella didn’t react at all to the hit. I chambered another round and got set to put a second one into him but he spun around and bolted back in the other direction and over a small knoll.

“Hang on, mate, I’m gonna have to run him down,” I said.

Thumbing the throttle we flew over the rise and there he was still running. I took off a bit closer and the buck pulled up, spun around and looked straight at us. I jammed on the brakes while at the same time reaching for my rifle.

I planted another projectile into his chest. The buck jumped at the hit, ran another 20m and finally toppled over.

“About time, you tough bugger,” I said.

He was no record breaker but still a nice little buck that will look good as a full body mount.

JD joined us next morning as Craig had to leave at lunch time. They piled into one of the Cruisers

I was after a scrub bull or cull buffalo to try out my .460 S&W.”

and I headed off on my quad. Today I was after a scrub bull or cull buffalo to try out my .460 S&W.

We came across a group of buffalo cows and calves. Craig needed some meat to make some more jerky so we decided I would shoot the cow and he would drop the calf. They were mooching around about 50 metres away when I shot her, smashing the shoulder to pieces and destroying the heart and lungs. Craig dropped the calf.

Looking for a scrub bull, we came out onto a large swampy area surrounded by light timber. We found a large scrubber — a nice brindle bull with reasonable horns. I liked his colour so decided to get a bit closer and see if I couldn’t get a shot into him. Gently picking my way towards the bull, I managed to close the distance to less than 50 metres before he decided to start walking off.

Following him through the scope I squeezed the trigger on the Ruger



but at the instant it fired I knew I’d hit the bull too far back. He put on a short jog as I ejected the spent case and slid home a fresh one. The bull started walking again and this time I hit him perfectly with a high shoulder/spine shot and he collapsed immediately.

The next day JD and I went looking for some bulls again but this time I was had my 9.3x62mm. We didn’t see anything that I wanted to shoot that morning but later in the afternoon I bowled over a few big sows and one fairly toothy boar.

An early start saw JD and I back out rolling the wheels in the hope of finding another scrub bull and a cull buffalo bull. We had looked about for an hour or two when we happened upon a young buff bull.

“He’s a cull buffalo,” JD said as we pulled up several hundred metres away on top of a hill.

“Yeah, he’ll do me, mate,” I told him. My Remington 760 was loaded with two soft points followed by two



Rifles and loads

The rifle I used on the blackbuck was a Weatherby Mk V Ultralight chambered in the wicked little .240 Wby Mag, with a Swarovski Z3 3-10x42 scope. My handloads consisted of 54 grains of AR2213sc behind a 100gn Nosler Partition.

I had a few different firearms that I wanted to try on scrub bulls and cull buffalos. One is a Ruger No 1 in .460 Smith & Wesson wearing a Leupold VX-II 2-7x33. I was using a load of 48 grains of Hodgdon LiL' Gun pushing 275gn Barnes XPB projectiles at 2620fps and turning out 4120ft-lb of muzzle energy. Caution: do not try to duplicate this load in a standard .460 S&W and definitely not in a pistol! My Ruger has a very long throat that allows me to seat projectiles to an overall length of 2.700" and increase room for powder. I have gone up a few more grains of powder before any sign of high pressure but I still consider 48 grains a maximum load.

The other rifle I used was a Remington 760 Game Master pump-action I had rebarrelled to 9.3x62mm, topped with a Leupold VX-III 1.75-6x32 in Leupold QR mounts. It is spitting out 286gn Woodleigh RN SN and solids at 2350fps using 56 grains of AR2206H.

I also carried my Zastava .458 Win Mag in the gun scabbard loaded with 510gn Winchester factory rounds as a backup if things turned nasty. Thankfully, it wasn't needed.

ON THIS SPREAD

4 A mob of young scrub bulls pose obligingly for a photo.

5 The .460 S&W proved its point when it felled this brindle scrub bull.

6 9.3mm projectiles recovered from the massive scrub bull: the flattened 286gn RN SN and the 286gn solid.

solids. I slowly rode down the hill with JD following in the Cruiser. Pulling up about 40 metres from the buff I sent the first Woodleigh on its way. It smashed into his shoulder, breaking the bone and destroying the heart and lungs.

As quick as a flash I pumped the rifle and sent the other three projectiles on their way. Even though the buffalo was dead on his feet after the first shot I wanted to try getting as many shots off as fast as I could.

We soon had the photos taken and head removed and were on our way again. With JD driving up the track in front of me, we hadn't gone more than a few hundred metres when he pointed to a huge scrub bull just off to our right.

"Yep, I'll take him," I said.

Placing the crosshairs on the shoulder I touched off the shot. The big bull spun around faster than any rodeo bucking bull. I rammed another round into the chamber and whacked him in the other

shoulder. This caused the big fellow to stop still and stagger.

Not waiting for him to drop, I hit him again. That last shot did the trick and his feet collapsed from under him.

We didn't realise how big he was until we stood next to him. His body was enormous! JD stepped him out at approximately 12 feet and we estimated he'd weigh up to at least 1100kg. I was over the moon with taking him. Even though he only had little horns I didn't care because the sheer size of the beast made him into a top trophy in my eyes and he'd look great as a shoulder mount.

After lunch at the house I told JD not to rush doing his jobs at the shed because I was very happy with the past few days of hunting. Instead of going out again in the afternoon I just wanted to sit in the shade and relax with a nice cold scotch. That was how I closed out another great week on Mary River Station. 



SPECIES GUIDE: HOG DEER

Jared Matthews reveals the secrets of hog deer, our smallest but

Australia's most elusive



most challenging deer species.



Hog deer is the species that holds most trophy hunters back from completing the grand slam of Australia's six deer species. There are few hunting opportunities for them.

MY friends' dad had hunted them and, as a kid, I always admired the hog deer trophies on his wall. He was the one who inspired me to enter the Blond Bay Hog Deer Advisory Group ballot, but to this day I have never been drawn. Luckily for me, I have had a few other opportunities to hunt them and seen some magnificent stags in my time, both with the rifle and camera.

Hog deer (*Axis porcinus*) are native to several Asian countries including India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Burma. Numbers are dramatically declining due to habitat loss and human pressure.

They were first introduced to Australia in October 1865, when three stags and nine hinds were released at Opossum Creek at Corner Inlet on the east side of Wilsons Promontory. Subsequent releases were made near Sale, Seymour and Gembrook. The hog deer thrived along the coastal swampland but declined in numbers further inland.

Physical characteristics

Hog deer are the smallest of the six Australian deer species and have some similarities to their axis genus relatives. A mature stag will stand around 700mm high at the back line and weigh approximately 50kg (40kg dressed) whilst a hind will generally max out at 600mm high and 30kg in weight.

Hog deer are generally thick set with short legs, hence the name 'hog' deer. Their winter coat is very thick, brown in colour with a light tan on their underparts, much like sambar. Most hog deer carry a dark dorsal stripe down their back and along their spine with light coloured spots sometimes visible either side of the stripe.

A hog deer's tail is brown but you can't mistake the white flag that pops up on the underside when one is alarmed or running away.

The antlers of hog deer stags generally consist of six points, similar to a sambar and chital deer, with brow tines, inners and outer tines. They are shorter in length, maxing out at around 18-20 inches. It's not unusual to see multiple tines and deformities on their antlers. I took a stag with a piped antler and an additional brow tine.

Habitat and distribution

Hog deer like to live in swampy coastal country with thick tussock and tea tree. Often, they won't venture out far from good, thick cover to feed unless they really need too. On farm fringes, hog deer will let their guard down a little to get more time on better pasture but they will be on high alert.

Unlike other species, hog deer have struggled to gain in numbers. This is due to a combination of habitat pressure combined with being prey to the likes of foxes and eagles.

Hog deer can be found on the South Coast of Victoria, ranging from San Remo right along the coast to as far as Eden in NSW.

Hog deer sign

Hog deer sign is a lot harder to identify than other deer species. Living in a coastal environment, more often than not there is a sandy base. One thing I have learnt is hog deer sign disappears very

quickly so a location with little sign doesn't necessarily mean there isn't a lot of deer there. The foot prints drift away in the sand quickly and the deer scat can be very hard to come across.

Rub trees are a good indicator, however.

Being little deer, they can be hard to find at the best of times.

The best place to look for sign is fresh watering holes, which quite often will have various game trails from different directions to give the deer opportunities to approach the water with the wind in their faces.

Season and ballots

The hog deer season starts 30 minutes before sunrise on 1 April and concludes 30 minutes after sunset on 30 April. This is in place to minimise the impact to the breeding productivity of hog deer, which need all the help they can get to remain at a sustainable level.

To harvest hog deer, you must

apply for tags. Each hunter can harvest one stag and one hind per year. Upon filling your tag, you must take your deer to the checking station located at various locations along the coast. There, they weigh the deer, take DNA samples and measure different components of the deer to help with research.

Even if you aren't successful through the season, you must fill out the tag return form and send it back to the Game Management Authority or you could face a hefty fine.

Ballots are run for hunting on Snake Island, Blond Bay State Game Reserve and Boole Poole Peninsula.

All the details and tag applications are available at gma.vic.gov.au.

Hunting methods

Stalking is popular. For hog deer, it consists of finding fresh sign and following it up, slowly making

ON THIS SPREAD

1 Hog deer thrive on the coastal fringe of south-eastern Australia, predominantly in Victoria.

2 A moment like this is rare and you'd better be prepared to take your shot or perhaps miss the only opportunity you'll ever have.



your way along game trails to points of interest. This requires lots of patience, slowly walking and glassing into the bush or small tussock patches. Personally, I have found this method very unproductive. Hog deer will lay low in tussock or scrub until you pass or bounce away before you get a chance at a shot.

Sitting and waiting is better. This means sitting in a secluded spot where you are out of sight, close to feeding areas or watering holes. You might do it in a tree stand, transportable stand or other structure with some height. I have found this most productive and have taken three hog deer stags this way.

It takes a lot of patience and can be very brain-numbing, especially with the pesky mosquitos and sand flies we get on the coast.

Tools of the trade

Victorian regulations dictate the minimum rifle calibre for hog deer is .243 (6.17mm) with a minimum projectile weight of 80 grains. The minimum draw weight using a bow is 45 pounds. The arrow must be fitted with a broadhead having a combined arrow weight of 350 grains. Whether you choose to use more than that is up to your individual preferences.

I have found the 7mm Rem Mag a great calibre for hog deer paired with a 150-grain projectile.

A pair of binoculars are a must have. In hog deer habitat you often need to look through tight little windows to investigate any movement.

A ground blind can be a great tool for hunting hog deer. They are reasonable cheap and help hold your scent in. Other methods I have seen people use are old fruit-picking ladders with wheels on them to tow around; this also makes a great way to get your hog deer out of the bush.

Hunting advice

My experience hunting hog deer is they do not tolerate human pressure, especially human scent. If you scent up an area, they will turn nocturnal very quickly, so



“

Being little deer, they can be hard to find at the best of times.”

your best bet is to sit back and wait. Sitting and waiting can really get the better of some people. I have sat in a tree stand for 48 hours, questioning myself about whether I was making the right decision, but then a hog deer popped out and all that questioning went out the window.

Most hog deer are shot either over water or feed, these being the two weaknesses they have. If the weather is warm, it is likely hog deer will come out for water during the middle of the day. If not, your best bet is relying on them coming out to feed. In low-pressure areas this could certainly be any time of day.

The advice I have stuck by since day one is to make a practical hide or tree stand that you can comfortably sit in for hours on end. Get yourself a bottle to urinate in and use a tea-tree oil mix to keep the sand flies at bay. Ensure you have plenty of coffee and snacks so you can keep your concentration sharp.

Most of all, don't leave the hide unless you really have to, and try to avoid letting your scent flow in

to the area you expect to see game. This has worked every time for me and for hunters I have given the advice to.

Enter the hog deer ballot every year and explore some of our great public land we have on offer. Above all, enjoy the hog deer journey and learning all there is to know about them. It is definitely a highlight for me. 🎯





Spika gaiter range

Spika has released the Strike Gaiter, designed and tested specifically to protect against the strike of Australian snakes. Built from heavy-duty PU bonded canvas, this contoured armour will cover your entire lower leg and attach to your boots, leaving nothing exposed. These snake-resistant gaiters are also fully adjustable, featuring a four-way closure system, with wires included. Tested by wildlife expert Michael Alexander from Black Snake Productions, Spika Strike Gaiters offer peace of mind when out bush. They retail for \$149.95.

In addition to the Strike Gaiters, Spika offers a general-purpose gaiter in Biarri camo. This all-round leg protection, constructed from a brushed polyester outer with a DWR coating, helps repel water and offers silent use when tramping through the scrub or long grass. It's also backed by heavy-duty ripstop material for strength and durability



ABOVE: The Spika Strike Gaiter is designed specifically to protect against snake bite.

ABOVE LEFT: Spika's general-purpose gaiter is a tough and practical bit of kit.

and features Duraflex buckles, a four-way closure system, shoelace hook and adjustable gaiter wires. It's recommend retail is \$114.95.

To find out more about Spika's gaiters or its full range of outdoor apparel ask at your local gun shop or visit www.spika.com.au.

Meopta MeoSport R 3-15x50 SFP rifle scope

Meopta riflescopes offer superb clarity and excellent value for money. The MeoSport R 3-15x50 is fairly new to the range. This rifle scope features a 5x zoom and is of 30mm tube construction. It also has 90 MOA of adjustment travel and parallax adjustment from just 10 yards to infinity.

Don't be fooled by its price tag, as this budget-minded riflescope offers quality and dependability. Accurate and rugged, the MeoSport features MeoBright lens coatings that deliver a bright, crisp and clear image even in inclement weather thanks to Meopta's MeoDrop hydrophobic lens coating that repels water droplets. The MeoSport R 3-15x50 is fully sealed and nitrogen purged, making it water, fog and shock proof.

Mounted in the second focal plane, the illuminated 4C Dichro reticle has an illuminated red-dot centre. Ideal for long or close range shooting, the MeoSport features lockable zero-reset exposed turrets that are quick and simple to use. The MeoSport R 3-15x50 also comes complete with 30mm rings that are made for attachment to a picatinny rail.

To find out more ask at your local gun shop or visit www.winchesteraustralia.com.au. We'll have a review of this scope in our next issue. Retail price is around \$795.



Norica air rifles

Norica has been producing air guns since 1917. This Spanish manufacturer has recently released the new break-action Omnia ZRS that takes air rifles to another level. The new ZRS system eliminates recoil to the shooter by utilising a recoiling barrel assembly in a rock-steady stock so there's no recoil at the shooter's end.

Featuring a synthetic ambidextrous stock with adjustable cheekpiece and pistol grip, the whole design ensures better accuracy and smooth shooting. Add to this, the firearm incorporates

an aluminium compression cylinder as opposed to steel, adjustable trigger system and automatic safety.

The Norica Omnia is available in .177 and .22 calibres. It has fibre-optic front and rear sights, 11mm rail along the cylinder for scope mounting, and simple disassembly and assembly without special tools.

Ask to see them at your local dealer or visit www.osaaustralia.com.au for more information.





Hera Industries

Hera Industries was founded in Germany in 2008 and soon after expanded into the European and US markets. While Hera manufactures premium hunting and sporting weapons, it also offers a large range of accessories like magazines and rifle stocks. The Hera H7 rifle chassis is one of the standouts. These stock systems are now available here in Australia to suit Remington 700 short actions (.308 Win etc), Bergara B14 and Howa 1500 short-action rifles.

Made of impact-modified polymer with an aluminium V-block and aluminium fore-end, these aftermarket stocks are now available in black, tan or green and come with two spacers, a polymer cheek pad and an AICS-compatible five-round magazine. These stocks are all made in Germany and are designed for a modern look and easy drop-in installation.

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



Christensen Arms Ridgeline Scout

Christensen Arms offers an excellent range of modern bolt-action rifles that are renowned for their sub-MOA guarantee. Its latest offering is the Ridgeline Scout, which combines all the best features of the Ridgeline into a new compact scout rifle. Starting at 2.7kg, the Ridgeline Scout has a black nitrate-coated action, 0 MOA optic rail, barricade stop, AICS drop-box magazine and a flat-shoe Trigger-Tech trigger system, all in a tan and black carbon-fibre composite sporter stock.

Other features include a 16-inch barrel with a removable three-prong flash eliminator, stainless-steel bedding pillars, free-floating aero-grade carbon-fibre wrapped barrel and skeletonised bolt handle. It is available in a host of popular chamberings including .300 Blackout, .223, 6.5 Creedmoor, .308 and 6mm ARC.

To find out more ask at your local dealer or visit www.osaaustralia.com.au.



ARB Zero fridge

I can't begin to tell you just how valuable my ARB fridge is to me when out bush. Whether camping, meat shooting or trophy hunting, it's always ensured perishables stay fresh, cool or frozen even in the hottest weather conditions. In fact, my old ARB fridge has lived on the back of the Hilux for more than 12 years now and is used on a weekly basis when travelling between the city and the bush, not to mention all my hunting trips.

ARB expanded its range of portable fridge/freezers from the original Classic model that was blue/grey in colour to an upgraded version, the Classic SII, which incorporates the use of a phone app and several other useful changes.

After that, ARB released its Elements range of portable fridge/freezers with a stainless-steel outer and a host of other new ideas like a gas strut to keep the lid open and lots more.

ARB's latest fridge/freezer, the Zero, incorporates Bluetooth technology and the ability to run two separate internal compartments to keep certain items cold and others frozen.

The Zero single-zone portable fridge freezer is available in a 36, 44 and 60 litre versions. These can be used as a portable fridge or freezer. Next are the 69 and 96 litre dual-zone fridge/freezers which can be run as a fridge, a freezer or both. While the 69L model offers a single lid with separate internal freezer compartment, the 96L model incorporates a dual-lid system for totally separate compartments. Both offer the ability to swap opening sides thanks to a smart, quick-release lid system. So you can change the opening side to suit the setup of your 4WD, caravan or home use.

For extra convenience, the Zero range has front and rear DC inlets, depending on what side

you open your fridge from, and a front AC inlet for 240V home use. There's even a handy USB outlet on the front to charge devices such as a mobile phone, torch etc. Next, while you can check and control the temperature via the panel on the front of the fridge, you can also monitor and control it wirelessly via a free app for compatible Bluetooth devices like a mobile phone. You can adjust temperatures, check battery input voltage and set up custom cooling profiles from your camp chair.

Like all ARB fridge/freezer systems, the Zeroes can be complemented by a range of useful accessories including a slide for quick and easy access, a special tie-down system to

ensure your fridge stays safe and secure while in transit, and a well-designed transit bag to protect the fridge from knocks and scratches. This in turn will also improve cooling efficiency with its extra layer of insulation.

These new transit bags also have magnetic inserts on the lid cover, so you don't have Velcro or chords to contend with. Cut-outs are provided for the display panel and plug-in points. There are side pockets to store items such as power chords.

The ARB Portable Power Pack is another great product from ARB to suit their full range of fridges. This little gem is ideal for use in camp when your vehicle is out of use. Capable of running a portable fridge for up to 18 hours, the 15Ah power pack can be fully charged in 5-6 hours. It weighs a mere 1.65kg and features a water and dust proof rating. Rubberised magnets keep the pack secured to your fridge. To operate, simply connect the power cable to the DC outlet and press the on/off button.

See the full range of ARB fridge/freezers and accessories at your local ARB outlet or for more information visit arb.com.au.

ABOVE: Whether you're using it for food or, say, keeping hides cool, a portable fridge is an excellent accessory.

BELOW LEFT: The ARB Portable Power Pack weighs only 1.65kg.

BELOW: The new Zero range of fridges includes some with both fridge and freezer compartments.



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Watching your brass

Understanding brass and how it responds will ensure safe and reliable reloading.

COMMERCIAL cases of whatever type — rimless, rimmed, belted, semi-rimmed, centrefire or rimfire — are generally made of brass, with few exceptions. There are low-pressure rimfire cases made of copper. Shotgun cases nowadays are plastic; few are made of paper and brass anymore. The Germans made many military cases of steel during both the first and second World Wars, and the Americans made many in .30-06 and .45 ACP. Today, there is some Russian ammunition with cases made of steel.

Cartridge brass is actually an alloy, composed of about 70 percent copper and 30 percent zinc. Some common American brands may include a trace of silver, and alloy proportions may vary for a few tenths of a percent. Cases for premium ammunition may have a plating of nickel, but they are still brass and are treated as such in all reloading procedures.

Cases are made from sheet brass. Each disc that is stamped out is formed into a cup, and gradually formed into the completed case by a series of dies. The brass should be good and clean to start with, but the care taken in working it determines its eventual strength. Working brass makes it hard and brittle, so as the case goes through a series of dies it has to be annealed by being heated red-hot in a furnace.

Brass that has not been

annealed enough is brittle and may pull itself in two when it is fired. Brass that is too soft clings to the walls of the chamber and expands into the reamer marks, making extraction difficult. Also, the primer pocket can open up allowing gas to leak past the primer which, if the pocket is enlarged enough, allows the primer to fall out when the bolt is opened.

Brass that is just right is hard yet springy. The pockets are tight so that primers stay in and do not leak. Extraction is easy.

Much of this brass business is relative. Extraction problems, gas leaks and blown primers are usually thought of as signs of excessive pressure, but on occasion it can be perfectly normal pressures and soft brass.

Years ago, a European manufacturer turned out several lots of ammunition with soft brass. I got some of it in .243 and .270. Fired in my strong bolt-action rifles, primers leaked or blew and the cases were hard to extract. During summer when temperatures were higher than normal, increased pressures caused the extractors to tear through the soft rims and putty-like brass expanded into every reamer mark in the chamber.

If cases are hard to extract, if primers show a dark ring around the edges, if they are blown out or fall out, and if fresh primers are very easy to seat, either the pressure is too



Even the best cases you can buy will grow brittle with extensive reworking.”

high or the brass is too soft.

Soft brass is hardly ever encountered these days and most unprimed cases are nicely made and polished. Premium quality cases all are of uniform length and have their necks rounded out and chamfered. Some sold in plastic bags get knocked about so that case necks are out of shape. These cases will need to have their necks rounded out before trimming to uniform length, deburring and chamfering before you can begin to load them.

Even the best cases you can



Any defective cases should be junked. #1 shows an incipient head separation; #2 and 3 have cracked necks; #4 is lengthwise crack caused by brittle brass and/or a sloppy chamber; #5 has a circumferential neck crack; #6 is coming apart a quarter of the way up.

buy will grow brittle with extensive reworking. Each time a case is fired, gas pressure causes it to expand tightly against the wall of the chamber. As the pressure falls off, a good case springs back a bit, close to its original dimensions, and extraction is easy. But the case is never exactly the same size as it was before it was fired, and for this reason cases fired in one rifle can rarely be used in another, even if the calibre is the same, unless they are full-length resized to bring them back to their original dimensions.

Full-length resizing can be overdone. Cases are usually made so that they will fit in a rifle with a minimum chamber. A rimless case measuring, say, 1.938" from head to a point midway on the shoulder (the datum line) is fired in a chamber measuring 1.944". The brass stretches to fit. Then it is full-length resized. The shoulder is moved back a bit, so that the case now measures 1.940".

When the case stretched from 1.938 to 1.944, the first time it was fired, the brass became thinner just forward

of the thick section of the case near the head. Then, when it was resized, the shoulder was moved back. The brass has to go somewhere, so the neck lengthens a little.

When the case is reloaded and fired, the shoulder of the case again expands to position against the shoulder of the chamber, and each time the same section of brass becomes a bit thinner and eventually the neck of the case will grow long enough to make it hard to chamber and need trimming. If full-length sizing is kept up, the case must eventually

suffer a head separation on firing or pull in two as it is extracted from the chamber. If half the case is left stuck in the chamber and you are out in the field, you've got a serious problem.

If you doubt this, saw in two lengthwise a case that has been fired and full-length resized several times. Usually, with the naked eye you'll be able to see where the case has grown thin at the critical point where cases are prone to pull apart. An easier method is to take a piece of fine, strong wire, make a hook on the end, insert it into the case and pull it up and down against the inside wall. If there is an incipient head separation the hook on your feeler will catch in it.

Every handloader should own a dial caliper with which to check maximum and minimum case length. It can tell you if cases are too short or too long; also if their necks have lengthened from repeated firings which will make for higher pressures and poor accuracy.

Military 7.62 Nato (.308) cases often run smaller than commercial cases, for in battle, extraction must be easy despite fouled chambers and dirty ammunition.

Some ammunition may have the primers crimped. Federal's commercial .223 ammunition, for example, has the primers crimped in to prevent them backing out when fired in military-style automatic weapons. After depriming, this crimp must be removed because the excessive force needed to seat a fresh primer can deform or even ignite it.

An acquaintance using a priming tool holding 100 primers ignited a primer by trying to force it into a crimped pocket. He was lucky to escape serious injury, but the force of the explosion blew a large hole in the ceiling of his shed.

A brass case does not last forever and the wise handloader will not reload cases that are more than 10 or 12 years old. Formed into a case, brass is brittle and this brittleness increases with age. This usually shows up first in ‘season cracking’ at the neck, and this commonly happens with very old ammunition. These cracks result in poor accuracy, escaping gas, and throat erosion, but in themselves they are not dangerous.

Neck cracks are dangerous, however, because they give an indication that the whole case may be brittle — and if the case is brittle toward the head there may be a case head separation. It is only good sense not to use such cases.

Even the best cases do not last forever in use. High-quality brass may be used with full power loads 20 or 30 times even with full-length sizing. Nor have I ever known brass to have a longer life when neck sized only. With either method, necks will gradually get thinner and if pressures are high, primer pockets will enlarge until they do not hold the primers satisfactorily. Cases should be discarded by reloaders as soon as they show signs of thin necks and loose primer pockets.

Another thing to avoid is using light loads in cases and then reloading the same cases with full-power loads. A rimless case fired with a sub-load is driven forward in the chamber, the neck lengthened, and the body shortened. The next time the case is used it gives excessive headspace in the same chamber; and if a full-power load is used and the brass is on the brittle side, it may blow out toward the head.

The effect is just the same as if the chamber were too long or if the case had been inadvertently shortened by improper full-length resizing. After firing, such cases will

RIGHT: New brass not only needs the necks rounded out, but should be trimmed to uniform length, deburred and chamfered.

show either protruding primers or complete head separations — sure signs of excessive headspace.

Even the slightest crack in the case means something. A complete or partial head separation may mean very brittle brass — from improper annealing at the factory (rare today), from age, or being work-hardened from too much full-length sizing. A lengthwise crack, on the other hand, means poor brass, an oversized chamber, or both, with my money bet on poor brass.

Check for anything that hints at a possible weakening of the case body about 6mm (¼ inch) ahead of the rim. This may take the form of a shiny ring or partial ring around the case, or any mark that suggests that the brass has been stretched longitudinally. It appears most frequently in belted magnum cases and those which have been fired in a rear-locking rifle or lever and slide-action types.

A protruding primer indicates a case that is too short for the chamber (excessive headspace) or a case driven into the chamber and shortened by a powerful primer combined with a sub-load.

A leaking or blown primer may mean high pressure, too soft brass, or an old case with with an enlarged or oversize primer pocket; or an undersize primer — a condition that arises now and then when using primers of one make in cases of another.

A too-long neck means that pressure has lengthened the brass there and the neck should be trimmed back to its original length. If case length is allowed to grow beyond certain limits, the case mouth can be jammed into the origin of the rifling groove and lands



“

Neck cracks are dangerous because they give an indication that the whole case may be brittle.”

upon chambering. It cannot then expand to release the bullet as gas pressure builds up behind it, and those pressures can go sky high.

Reloading manuals list what is called a ‘trim-to’ length which is the dimension below which cases should not be shortened.

Some cases are stronger than others. Cases for the .30-30 and similar cartridges are made to stand pressures of around 42,000psi, but cases for rimless calibres like the .270 and .284 normally stand pressures up to 55,000psi. Belted magnum cases are loaded up to 60,000psi, while super magnums which have thick webs and greater strength toward the head will handle very high pressures — up to 63,000psi.

Every now and then a wildcatter gets a notion about necking a case up or down to produce his personal dream round. There’s nothing wrong with this, except that you should be certain before you spend a lot of money for a custom barrel, loading dies and a fancy stock, that the webbing on your chosen case is designed for the pressures you anticipate in the final, wildcat version.

In most designs of rifle actions the brass case is the weak link in the chain because pressures are limited not by what the action will stand, but by what the brass will stand. The critical mechanical element of the case is the design of the web — the solid section of the brass in and just in front of the head. Certain web designs are inherently stronger than others.

The web along with the tensile strength of the brass alloy determines the strength of the case, which in turn represents the ultimate strength of the firearm itself.

The cartridge case, then, can tell some interesting stories. It represents about half the cost of the cartridge, and on it depends the accuracy and safety of the firearm. Instead of simply continuing to reload them, it isn’t a bad idea to give them a thorough inspection every now and then. ⊕

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Madam President

Chloe has taken on a new role in the hunting and shooting community.



LEFT: In the blood, indeed. Chloe has grown up around firearms and hunting so taking a leadership role comes naturally.

“

It is so important to encourage more and more people to get involved.”

WINGECARRIBEE Hunters and Anglers Club is my local hunting club. It's exciting to have seen its growth since it was founded. Club activities and our diverse membership have both grown dramatically. Now I get to watch it grow more from my new role as the club president.

It's thrilling to follow in my dad's footsteps. I am only the second president the club has ever had.

As I've said in many articles before, hunting clubs are a place to gather with likeminded people, to learn new skills and to further one's

knowledge of hunting different species of game. I always look forward to the third Thursday of every month to be able to attend our monthly meetings.

Our new committee will strive to maintain this excitement. Matt, Geoff, Chris, Paul, Steve, Craig and I will work hard for it. We will also stick to the original mission statement of our club but add a newer, modern flare. We've also promised to keep the ACES — apathy, complacency, ego and self-interest — out!

With my new role of president, I want to get the ball

rolling by encouraging more juniors and women to join the sport of hunting. Without juniors, our sport is a slowly ticking time bomb, as this tradition that has been passed down since the first humans will not have anyone to continue it.

I also want to continue pushing for more females to get involved, especially because it is a sport I have grown up with. Having more women hunting also helps everyone in the industry; it changes the stereotype that hunters are all just “stale, pale males”.

To help the promotion of

hunting and the continuation of our sport, it is so important to encourage more and more people to get involved and to go to club meetings. Our door is always open and new members are always welcome. Jump over to our website to keep up to date with our monthly meetings and other club events: wingecarribeehuntersanglers.com.au.

Of course, ours isn't the only hunting and shooting club with a welcoming attitude and lots to offer. If you haven't already, check out your local clubs. 📍

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WINNER



Paul Ball is this month's winner for this pic of what he calls a "dirty wallow boar".

"I caught him coming out of a pool of mud in a timberline," says Paul. "At least he had his last moment as per the old saying, happy as a pig in mud."



"Jack bagged this handy little boar on a morning run checking traps," says **Dan Simpson**. Looks like it was a good shot, too!



Kevin Rodwell just returned from a week at Scott Mitchell's boar hunting camp up in Far North Queensland.

"Shot this toothy critter from around 20 metres or so after surprising him while he was dozing in an undercut in a creek bank," says Kevin. "He took off but made a bad career move when he pulled up to see what had startled him. That was when I put the 1x Leupold red dot scope on his right shoulder, just behind his front leg, and gave him a 400gn Speer soft point for being nosey. He ran probably another 20 metres or so before he ran out of lung capacity due to punctured lungs."

"They all seem to be fairly toothy critters up there and this was my second time chasing boars there with Scott."

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