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FEBRUARY 2023

TESTED

Steyr's unique
Monobloc rifle
Hikmicro Stellar
thermal scope
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binoculars

Big pigs in
the Top End
Patience pays
with fallow
Taking Ted:
a four-year-
old's first hunt

Hunting buffalo
in new country

TERRITORY MONSTERS



SHOOTING RESTS



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CALDWELL TACK DRIVER BAG FILLED
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20



STEYR MONOBLOC

A new concept in rifle design, the Monobloc's barrel and receiver are a single unit, creating a rigid and perfectly aligned weapon. Yet there's much more to the Steyr, too, as you can see by its styling. That's real leather for the grips, and you can swap them for different colours. Find out all about it in Nick Harvey's review.

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ON THE COVER

Zac McKenzie photographed this solid buffalo bull on his NT hunt.



Bigger and better prizes to win!

If you haven't yet entered any of the *Sporting Shooter* competitions, there are even more reasons to get into it now.

WE'VE upped the ante for our competitions! Between them, Hunter's Gallery, Hunter's Diary and Bacon Busters all boast amazing prizes that we're really excited to offer you.

Garmin sponsors Bacon Busters, an apt arrangement for a photo competition all about pig hunting. Garmin's navigational devices are renowned, of course, and the monthly prize we're now able to offer is the eTrex 22x. It's a sensational GPS device that retails for \$329!

Among other things, the eTrex 22x comes preloaded with topo maps, ideal for hunting. Its screen is readable in sunlight, a pair of AA batteries lasts up to 25 hours of continuous use in GPS mode, and it is tough and durable. Find out more on page 82. And then get some good pics of your busted bacon and fire them in to me.

Hunter's Diary is generously supported by optics supplier Extravision, a company with long-standing ties to hunting and shooting — and, of course, distributor of Vortex optics.

They've put up three major prizes that will be decided at the end of the year, with first prize being a \$2200 Vortex Razor HD LHT 3-15x42 rifle scope — pretty much the ideal all-round hunting scope.

To have a shot at winning the Razor (or a Vortex Viper 4-16x50 rifle scope or Vortex Diamondback HD 8x42 binoculars, if you get second or third prize), all you have to do is write a short hunting tale and include a good photo. Don't worry about the spelling and grammar because it's my job to tidy all that up, as long as you can spin an entertaining yarn for us. See the details on page 40.

Our premier prize, given away every month, is a Weatherby Vanguard rifle thanks to one of Australia's oldest and most active firearms distributors, TSA Outdoors, sponsors of the Hunter's Gallery photo comp. TSA Outdoors handles a host of brands, including Fiocchi ammunition and the Australian-designed ZeroTech optics.



You can win rifles, scopes, binoculars, GPSs and more in *Sporting Shooter's* different competitions.

I don't need to tell you how good the Vanguard is because we're all familiar with its long-established performance and quality, including its sub-MOA accuracy guarantee.

Forgive my lack of humility but I reckon a rifle of this standard, given away every month, is an impressive prize. There's one particular condition of entry: you've got to have a box of Fiocchi ammunition clearly visible in your photo. It's worth making the switch to Fiocchi if you haven't already. I'm not even eligible to enter but I use Fiocchi in a number of my rifles because of its accuracy

and performance. It's well priced, too.

Flick to page 38 for all the details about Hunter's Gallery.

While we're talking about competitions, don't forget we've got the Ridgeline Hunting Photo Competition running on our website, sportingshooter.com.au. Another chance to win!

You've got to be in it to win it, and people are winning these competitions all the time. Don't miss out on your chance.

MICK MATHESON
Editor

SPORTING
SHOOTER

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SUBSCRIPTIONS
WWW.GREATMAGAZINES.COM.AU
Call: 1800 807 760

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Subscription Rates:

1 year / 13 issues	\$113
1 year PLUS (print + digital)	\$125.00
Overseas 1 year rate	NZ \$136.00
ASIA \$136.00	ROW \$170.00

SPORTING SHOOTER

is published by Yaffa Media Pty Ltd,
17-21 Bellevue St, Surry Hills,
NSW 2010

Tel: (02) 9281 2333
Fax: (02) 9281 2750
ACN 54002 699 354



Publisher: Chris Yu

Production Director: Matthew Gunn

Studio Manager: Lauren Esdaile

Designer: Maria Alegro

Freelance submissions should be emailed to the Editor as a MS Word File or in Rich Text format with accompanying high resolution (1 Megabyte+) Jpg images in email packages no more than 14 megabytes per email. Alternatively stories and images on a memory stick/thumb drive can be mailed to the Editor at the above address.

The publishers exercise every care with regard to published figures relating to handloading data, no responsibility is accepted for any omissions or errors arising during the publishing process. Readers are advised to consult corroborating reloading information from at least two other industry sources or manuals. Further, neither publishers or editors accept responsibility for the accuracy of statements or opinions expressed by freelance writers.

ISSN 1835-6923

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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

Loads for the 9.3x62mm

Q I have had a 9.3x62mm rifle built on a Mauser 98 action with a 24" Pac-Nor barrel with 1:14 twist. I am reloading for it using RWS brass. I know you owned a similar rifle back in 2006 so can you suggest a couple of good loads for it using the 231gn Norma, the RWS 258gn H-Mantel and 293gn TUG? Which ADI powder and charge weight is best for each?
Charles A Reardon

A My rifle was based on a Mauser 98 action with 24" barrel. I gained the best performance with bullets weighing from 231 to 293 grains using AR2208 powder. A charge of 60gn with the 231gn bullet clocked 2650fps; 59gn behind the 258gn got 2545fps; and 57gn with the 293gn TUG got 2400fps, equalling the RWS factory load.



Nick dropped this caribou with a 258gn bullet from his Mauser 9.3x62mm on a hunt in northern Quebec.

Light bullets in the .458 Lott

Q I have a .458 Lott and am looking for load data for 325gn bullets (powder and charge weights) to handload, but I am having difficulty finding any load data anywhere for Australian powders for this particular combination of cartridge and bullet weight. Would you have any information about the power type and the charge weight I could use in the Lott?
Jarrah

A I gleaned the following loads from a number of different sources: 300gn Barnes, 75gn AR2207, 2768fps (claimed to be "mild and accurate"); 300gn bullet, 85gn AR2207, 2950fps; 350gn Hornady bullet, 79gn AR2207, 2650fps; 400gn bullet, 85gn AR2207, 2670fps;

and 465gn A-Square, 83gn AR2206H, 2349fps.

These loads come from several different sources so I can't really recommend them or be responsible for their use. However, you may be able to do something with them. It appears that an increase of seven or eight grains of powder in this big .45-calibre doesn't give much of an increase in muzzle velocity. Most of the articles I've read about the .458 Lott concentrate on heavy bullets for dangerous game, not varmint loads.

Accuracy problem with a Ruger No 1

Q I have a Ruger No 1 in .270 Winchester that doesn't group very well. I live in the bush, a long way from any gunsmiths and would like to know what I should check

“

There sure ain't no flies on the good 180gn Nosler Partition leaving the muzzle at 3100fps.”

and if there is anything I can do to fix the problem myself without having to send it away to a gunsmith?

Sean McDonald

A An accuracy problem with the Ruger No 1 usually exists in the forearm.

Over the years I've read many articles suggesting cures such as free-floating, installing a pressure screw at the tip of the forearm hanger, full-bedding and so on.

However, there are a few things you can look for: make sure the forearm isn't bearing hard against the front of the action. If it is, remove the pressure with a few strokes with a fine file, but it helps to epoxy-bed the tip of the forearm.

Less often, inaccuracy can be caused by pressure from the rear of the quarter rib bearing against the top of the action. If you can't see a slight gap between the rear of the rib and the front of the action, the rib may be slightly too long. If it is, as the barrel heats up the rear end of the rib exerts pressure against the action. This can be fixed by removing the rear rib and filing



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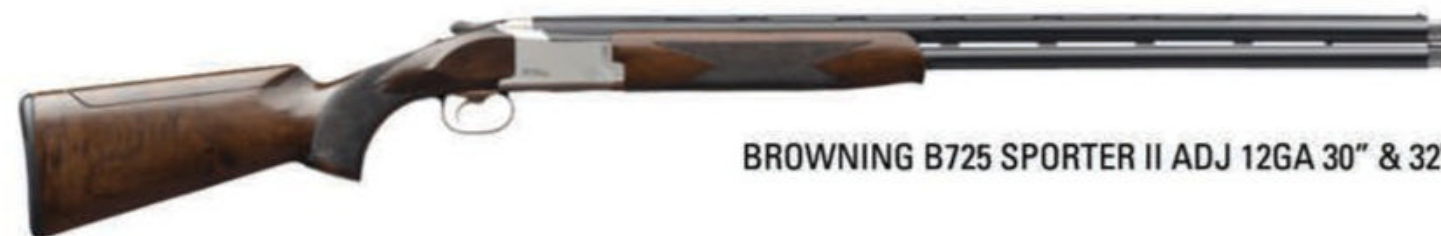
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What sticks in my memory of the XL7S is how smooth the bolt travel is.”

the rear end just enough to ensure there's no contact between the rib and the action when the rib is screwed back on.

Best bullet for a .300 Win Mag

QA rifle loonie I met at the shooting range warned me that the short neck of the .300 Win Mag, which measures a mere .264", allows a heavy 200gn bullet to move from lack of case neck tension and be driven back into the case when subjected to recoil in the magazine. He said that the same thing may happen with some of the longer 180gn bullets.

Is this true? If so, is there any way I can prevent this kind of thing from happening? What weight bullet do you prefer for big game in a .30 magnum?

Ron Matthews

AI've heard this complaint about the .300 Win Mag many times, but never from a hunter/reloader who owned one. Most modern rifles chambered for this cartridge have magazines and throats made long enough that bullets can be seated out where they belong (far enough out to gain all the efficiency of which the case is capable). Reloaders realised this and started seating heavy bullets out as far as the magazine would allow, because this helped hold heavy bullets more tightly in the short neck.

With today's tough 180gn bullets there is really no need for heavier 200 and 220gn bullets, as the 180s penetrate deeper and offer a flatter trajectory over normal hunting distance. While

the base of practically any 180gn bullet seats below the base of the neck, taking up some powder space, it does not reduce capacity enough to make a significant difference.

There sure ain't no flies on the good 180gn Nosler Partition leaving the muzzle at 3100fps. Sighted in 3" high at 100yd, it is 4" high at 200, on point of aim at 300, and only 9" low at 400.

Custom .404 Jeffery

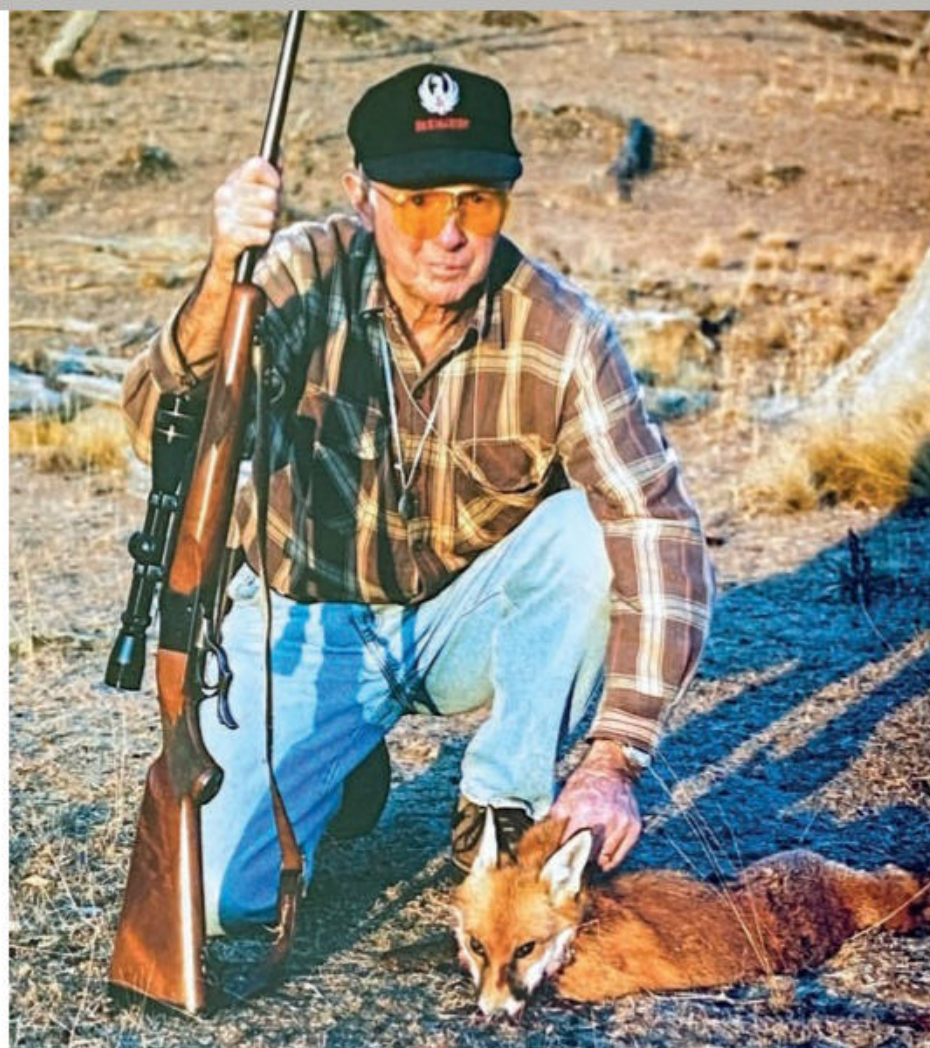
QI'm building a .404 Jeffery on a Ruger M77 magnum action and the barrel will be 24 inches long. I will be reloading for it and wish to duplicate Hornady's 400gn loading, which has a rated velocity of 2300fps.

I have a good supply of AR2208 powder, and ADI's reloading data lists a maximum load as giving 2100fps. Can you recommend a load that will give 2300fps?

My first rifle was a Ruger 10/22 bought new in 1972. I have been reading your articles and making use of your advice since then and would like to thank you for the half a century of enjoyment and shooter wisdom your articles and books have provided me, and I would also like to acknowledge your incalculable contribution to the Australian shooting industry and individual shooters over that period of time.

Roger Vickery

AThe .404 Jeffery as originally loaded was actually a fairly mild cartridge, essentially duplicating .450/400 ballistics in a bolt-action rifle. It drove a



The Ruger No 1 can be finicky with regard to accuracy and usually repays some attention to bedding of the forearm.

400gn bullet at the modest velocity of 2125fps for 4020ft-lb of muzzle energy, and it achieved its reputation with that original loading.

Maximum average chamber pressure is listed as 52,975psi up to a maximum of 60,929. The original rifling twist was 16.54 R/H, and bullets should be crimped.

Recommended powders are AR2209 and Re-15, but AR2208 should work just as well. A-Square lists 86gn of AR2209 behind a 400gn bullet as developing 2221fps at 45,600psi. and 80gn of RE-15 for 2379fps at 49,800psi. For comparison, Hornady lists a maximum charge of 78.9gn of AR2209 giving 2200fps, and 84gn of RE-15 for 2350fps, both from a 24" barrel with a 1:11 twist.

I can't understand the 7gn difference between A-Square's charge of AR2209 and Hornady's.

Woodleigh lists a starting load of 75gn of AR2208 for 2165fps up to a maximum of 81gn for 2405fps, but states the loads are only suitable for bores of .422-.423" diameter. If you work up from 75gn of AR2208 behind a 400gn bullet you should be able to reach 2300fps safely.

Marlin XL7S

QI have been offered a secondhand Marlin XL7S bolt-action rifle in .25-06 which appears to have seen little use. It has stainless metalwork and a black synthetic stock. It comes with a Leupold 3.5-10x VX-III scope. I have never seen this model before, so can you tell me a few things about it? Is it a good, strong action? What kind of accuracy can I expect from the .25-06?

Ron Hutchens

AI remember testing one of these Marlins back in 2012. The rifle was an economy model and featured a round receiver with the recoil lug secured between the receiver ring and barrel nut, reminiscent of the Savage 110 and Remington 700 designs.

The bolt has two forward lugs and a 90 degree lift, and a countersunk bolt face with rotating extractor and plunger ejector. What sticks in my memory is how smooth the bolt travel is.

The trigger has a centred release like the Savage AcuTrigger. The stock is pillar-bedded for consistent

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accuracy, and a blind magazine holds four rounds of .25-06.

Yes, the XL7S is a good, strong rifle and if the button-rifled barrel is in good condition, it should give good accuracy. Take care to check the condition of the bore before you buy it.

Remington Model 6 confirmed

Q I am enclosing photos of a very old .22 rimfire rifle. It was given to me and is registered and I believe still operational. The photo shows details of its basic design, the serial number (6599) and the stamping “FL 22L”.

The registration papers refer to it as a Remington Model 6. However, I don’t believe this is correct. I am hoping that you can identify this rifle. The chap who gave it to me thought it may have been made from 1850 to 1860.
Ian Bull

A Your rifle is indeed a Remington Model 6 chambered for the .22 Long, not the .22 Long Rifle. The Remington Model 6 rolling-block rifle was made between 1902 and 1903 and numbered over 250,000. It is a small, lightweight rifle designed expressly for use by small boys.

It was chambered for the .32 Short and Long as well as the .22 Long. In addition, it was produced with a smooth-bore barrel for shot cartridges. The round barrel is 20” long and it has a takedown action with the barrel held on by a knurled knob underneath the frame. The straight-grip walnut stock has a small forearm.

If in reasonably good condition it may be of some interest to a collector.

Swapping bullet brands

Q I have a Bergara B-14 Ridge in 6.5 Creedmoor which has proven to be very



Light bullets for the .458 Lott include the Barnes 250gn FTX, Sierra 350gn FN and Woodleigh 350gn RNSP.



Small changes in bullet designs, such as length and bearing surface, can critically affect pressures.”

accurate with reloads featuring the Sierra 130gn bullet and AR2208. Now I am looking to try the Hornady 129gn SST using the same powder and charge that has proved so accurate. Is this going to work, or should I try a different powder and vary the charge?
Brian Cosgrove

A Small changes in bullet designs, such as length and bearing surface, can critically affect pressures. Therefore, I would suggest using data that was developed especially for the Hornady 129gn SST bullet.

You can use AR2208 if you like — about 38gn for 2825fps or 42gn of AR2209 for 2820fps. These loads proved safe for regular use in a Bergara rifle identical to your one.

A faster powder for the .270 Winchester

Q I have been an avid admirer of your articles and technical advice for over 40 years. I am loading my Sako 85 Varmint in .204 Ruger with AR2206H since W-748 became unobtainable, and I have a plentiful supply.

Recently I purchased a Sako

85 Hunter in .270 and I’m looking to load the Hornady 145gn ELD-X. I would like to use AR2206H as I am impressed with its performance in the .204 Ruger with regard to accuracy and consistent velocities.

I have the revised ninth edition of your reloading manual which only lists AR2206H with up to 140gn projectiles, then moves to AR2209 with 150gn bullets upwards. Would you recommend that I use AR2206H and, if so, can you suggest a starting load and a likely maximum load with the 145gn ELD-X? Or should I change to AR2209?

I was considering starting with 43gn of AR2206H and working up to 45.2gn max, watching pressure signs as I go. I’d appreciate any advice you may offer.

Brendan Pace

A AR2206H is too fast in its burning rate if you want to get top performance from the .270 Winchester. Slower AR2209 is better but AR2213sc is better still. With the 145gn ELD-X bullet and AR2213sc I recommend you load 58gn for about 2900fps. The maximum

listed charge is 60gn (a compressed load) which turns up 3000fps.

The maximum charge of 43gn of AR2206H behind the 145gn ELD-X gets only 2770fps. I warn against loading 43 to 45gn of AR2209, which is a dangerous underload and likely to result in secondary explosion effect (SEE). The starting load for AR2209 is 47.5gn for 2600fps and the maximum charge is 53gn for 2900fps.

Feeding problem easily rectified

Q Recently I purchased a rifle in 7mm Rem Mag built on a Mauser 98 action. It is a custom job with an elegant walnut stock and is very accurate. There’s only one thing wrong with it — it does not feed reliably.

If the bolt is worked fast, no problem, but when I try to chamber a round slowly, the cartridge under the right side of the follower will fail to come up under the extractor. I’ve been told that this is normal as belted cases don’t feed as smoothly and reliably as rimless cartridges. Is this true?

Jim Casley

A When the rimless magnums came into vogue, several American gun writers tried to justify their superiority by condemning belted cartridges for not feeding smoothly from bolt-action magazines. Of course, this is a load of BS! There’s nothing wrong with your rifle that a good gunsmith can’t fix.

My gunsmith, Rob Spittles, built several rifles for me which were chambered for belted magnums, and they would not only smoothly feed a magazine full of cartridges into the chamber, but also empty cases, which they chambered and ejected just like shelling peas. ☒

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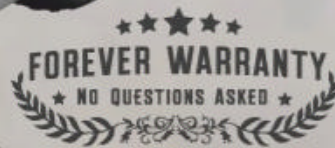
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Zac got up close and personal
with this buffalo bull in the
first hour of his hunt.



B

uffalo hunting is on every hunter's list of dream hunts. The cost can be prohibitive, which is what was stopping me, but I excitedly booked in with

Harry Stenton at True Wild Outfitters when I found out how much cheaper he is while still getting top-quality bulls.



I LOCKED in dates with Harry for July 2022 and couldn't wait for touch-down in Darwin.

The adventure started with the day's drive out to camp. I got my first look at wild buffalo, donkeys, millions of ant mounds and Harry's dog traps that had caught one of the many wild dogs roaming the scrub. It was a great start and I was just stoked to be here in the red dirt.

First morning around the fire in camp, anticipation is always high before setting out on the hunt, especially when it's a new species you've never hunted before. I was still asking Harry thousands of

questions about buffalo as the sun was starting to raise higher in the sky, when I noticed a dark blob by the river. Coffee in hand, I grabbed my binos and there was my first look at a mature buffalo bull.

Sneaking along the river bank, I crept in to about 20m and tried to get some photos of him. First hour of day one and my trip was already made. The memory of staring into the wild eyes of a 1000kg animal at this range is engrained into my memory forever.

By the time the heat of the day had reached its peak, we had seen some impressive bulls but none

you would call a first-day shooter. I had a whole week, so was happy to hold out for something special. I would've been stoked with many of the bulls we had already seen but figured that time was on my side and I could try for a unicorn.

We decided to push further into an area that Harry hadn't been before, not accessible by car, and therefore a place where big bulls should be lurking.

We left the Cruiser behind and walked into the afternoon, taking in the scenic river views and seeing splashes as crocodiles spooked. As we started to crest a



1

2



ON THIS SPREAD

1 True Wild offers deluxe hunting packages but what could beat their million-star accommodation option?

2 Zac packs out his trophy. Yep, he was one happy hunter.

3 This scrub bull was very old and unlikely to have survived another season, so was a good shooter.

3



“

small bank, I spotted what appeared to be a big bull lying down at around 40m. He didn't look quite right, lying on his side with all four legs out straight and his head at a strange angle. I was trying to process what I was looking at and concluded it was a dead bull.

“Haz,” I whispered, “there's a dead bull just over there.”

But it didn't make any sense. We were miles from the nearest road in a place with nothing but emptiness for hundreds of kilometres. Then his ear twitched.

“He's not dead, bro,” Harry said.

I figured time was on my side and I could try for a unicorn.”

This monarch was caught napping. As he stood up on the spot, we saw we had a very large, disgruntled buffalo in thick scrub at close range. Nose up in the air, trying to figure us out, this bull had a different aura than any of the other bulls we had seen so far.

His presence was intense, commanding respect, and it made me feel quite small. Every hunter

has seen animals like this, where for a moment you're just in awe of them and forget what you're there for. Harry's whispers snapped me back to our situation.

“He's a monster man, as soon as he turns, shoot him.”

I had the .375 loaded and on his chest pretty quick, but he just stood there staring for what seemed like eternity. My arms holding the rifle were getting heavy, waiting for the turn. But he didn't slowly turn, he went from facing us to sprinting sideways in one step, as big, elusive animals are known to do.

But he wasn't quick enough.

He soaked up a shot, went 20m and turned to face us again. We now had a very large, fatally wounded buffalo, startled, in thick scrub. My adrenaline was pumping. But he was hurt bad, blood pouring out his nose. He was struggling to suck in air and we knew he was done. I waited again for another shot to finish him.

He slowly turned this time and soaked another one. He only went another 10m and fell over. Approaching him, it was quite clear he's what you'd call a first-day shooter — take this shot because you might not find another one like it.

After photos, loading the pack, walking back to the car and driving a couple of hours to camp we enjoyed a couple of beers around the fire and basked in the impressiveness of this bull. Heavy bases and sweeping horns make it hard to express his size in photos but he was as old as the hills, teeth worn down and better than any bull I could've hoped for.

Still a few days left, our attention turned to scrub bulls. We hadn't come across any yet. Around here there are fewer of them and they're more elusive. We spent the next day driving to likely areas, walking for a bit to check it out and going to the next spot.

Harry then wanted to move into a different area and walk up into another new spot. I was more than keen, so up the river we went in the heat of the day, spotting



4

“

He went from facing us to sprinting sideways in one step. But he wasn't quick enough.”

buffalo, birds, crocodiles and a herd of buffalo cows where a particularly large one piqued my interest. We kept her in the back of our minds and pressed on.

Harry abruptly stopped and whispered, “Scrubbers!” A long tail dangling behind a tree was all that gave them away — great spotting. There were at least six or seven wild cattle in the herd, unaware of us as we watched. After a minute or two a large bull emerged.



5

I set up the rifle on my pack and tried to settle the crosshairs. However, with thick bush and many animals, I was catching glimpses of brown in the scope and unsure which one was the bull. Another minute or two down the scope, the bull became clear and I sent the shot.

We slowly approached and immediately saw him standing 60m from where he was shot, with no cows in sight. However, we could see he was hit well. He only stood for another few seconds before toppling over. Upon inspection, his teeth were down to the gums and we aged him at 12-13 years old. Doubtful he would've made another year — the perfect animal to take.

Still having a couple of hunting days left, my mind wandered to the big buffalo cow we saw. I decided she was worth pursuing. The next day, Harry went with some new

ON THIS PAGE

4 Safe for now: these two were off the menu when Zac found them, so they will live and grow for another day.

5 Zac's buffalo bull was a first-day shooter that he didn't regret, not with a spread like that.

6 A lone buffalo stands in the slow waters of a creek.



6

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clients that came into camp to find big buffalo bulls and I went with “Mad Dog” to find a big cow. It was actually quite a cold day for the Territory. We didn’t find any big cows but came across two absolute ripper bulls that the other guys would’ve shot in a second.

By the second-last hunting day, we journeyed up to the area we saw the big cow a couple of days ago and pushed in further. Spotting small bulls and cows, we kept going. Eventually, we came across a herd of around 25 animals with two big cows — we’d found them. There was also quite a big bull with the herd, but they spooked and split apart.

We decided to follow about six animals, including the bull and a big cow. After catching up with them, neither Mad Dog nor I were convinced this was the biggest cow. She was large but not the big girl we had seen, so we followed the bull. We knew he would try to push the two groups together again and that’s exactly what happened.

As soon as we saw the leader of the rest of the group it was obvious she was the big cow and the matriarch of the herd. However, she was already leading the group up the hill away from us, not running this time, only walking. There was enough time to get a shot into her and she came barrelling back down the hill, the rest of the herd following.

Now she was in the middle of the group and it was nearly impossible

7



“

He was better than any buffalo bull I could’ve hoped for.”

to get another shot off safely. She was single-lunged by the hard, quartering-away shot, so still on her feet. She slowly started to move back up the hill and I got another shot into her.

This time they all ran uphill and out of sight. We gave chase, almost over the hill, expecting to see the whole herd. We almost went straight past her. The others had left her behind under a tree; they had accepted she was finished. I put a final shot in and she was done.

We could get the car up to her and were back at camp late afternoon. The others rolled into camp with another big bull on the bullbar of the cruiser.

“You shoot another bull?” one asked.

“Nope, just a really heavy cow.”

There were quite a few heads in camp now and morale was high.

I spent my final day following the other guys around filming and taking photos. One of them shot an enormous cow that almost cracked the magic 100 points herself.

This trip was better than I could’ve ever expected and such a different experience to deer hunting. Hunting the heat of the day, late starts, lot of animals that weren’t particularly spooky — it’s an experience I’ll never forget. I’d highly recommend contacting Harry Stenton and the team at True Wild Outfitters if you want to experience buffalo hunting in the Northern Territory. You won’t be disappointed. 📍

CONTACT

Find out more and get in touch with True Wild Outfitters at truwildoutfitters.com.

ON THIS PAGE

7 The old Cruiser still does sterling work on safari.

8 The buffalo cow Zac shot had an excellent spread.

8





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A flagship bolt-action

The Steyr Monobloc is a new breed of hunting rifle with a single-piece barrelled action, European contours and unique features which will appeal to the connoisseur of fine firearms.

THIS rifle has a most intriguing feature: the barrel and receiver are made in one piece. Steyr reasons that this will create a more rigid and accurate firearm, and the results of our testing indicate this is true.

The Monobloc is also a modular rifle and Steyr implies you can switch calibres: one bolt and one stock and one trigger suffice for different bolt heads, magazines and barrelled actions. However, as the serial number applies to the entire barrelled action, Steyr's suggestion isn't valid under Australian registration laws.

Instead, what you have is a rifle whose appearance can be highly customised with different stocks, inlays and other components.

Steyr Arms is an innovative firearms company. It has been ever since Ritter von Mannlicher pioneered his designs in the last quarter of the 19th Century. His work was original. He was a pathfinder in the field of automatic weapons and designed a number of special repeating rifles and magazine systems.

Before von Mannlicher died in 1903 he developed over 150 models of automatic and repeating rifles.

In the 1950s Steyr became famous for its iconic, beautifully made Mannlicher-Schoenauer Sporter, which boasted a revolving spool-shaped box magazine that protected the cartridges by separating them from each other. Modified versions of



“

If looks could kill the Monobloc would rack up a considerable tally of game without firing a shot.”

this rotary magazine, which dates back to 1887, were used in the Savage Model 99 and are being used today in Ruger and Browning rifles.

The company's track record with its bolt-action rifles has been exemplary so it's no surprise that the Steyr Monobloc is something special. If looks could kill the Monobloc would rack up a considerable tally of game without firing a shot.

The stock is a real eye-catcher, not only for its modernistic styling, but for its balance and the way it allows the shooter to mount and align

it quickly. The comb slopes upward towards the rear and the cheekpiece puts the eye quickly in line with the scope.

The close pistol grip has a recess on the left side for the base of the thumb which, allied with a *wundhammer* palm swell on the right side, makes it a very comfortable grip. The fore-end is shaped so that it aids in controlling the rifle. It's round on the bottom and contoured to have a finger groove below its upper edge which makes it comfortable to grasp and hold steady.

There's a tendency among designers of rifle stocks to go



to extremes, as we've seen on a number of bolt-action sporters in recent years. But I believe that the talented people at Steyr, with an eye for practical features, have tried an angle here and a curve there, and come up with a cunning combination of beauty and general utility.

Not only that, but to gild the



lily even more, the cheekpiece, comb, fore-end and grip have removable leather inlays that give the Monobloc a very refined and classy appearance. The leather grip insert is grooved for the fingers. In addition, the left side of the comb is dished to reduce the rifle's impact on the shooter's face

— a major cause of flinching — and to help align the eye behind the scope.

The Monobloc offers a degree of modularity. All the leather inlays can be swapped for different coloured ones: sand, orange, brown and black. Even stocks can be replaced for a change in colour: black, green, brown

and an off white; several grades of walnut have also been introduced recently.

You can do all this yourself. The instruction booklet describes how to separate the stock from the action, and remove the trigger group as well as the inlays on the butt, cheekpiece, pistol grip and fore-end.

ON THIS SPREAD

1 Round-top receiver is grooved for Steyr's own mounts, which include a rail.

2 The Monobloc's strikingly modern appearance is enhanced by the leather inlays and sharp contours.



3

✓ SPECS

Manufacturer: Steyr Arms, Austria

Type: Bolt-action with one-piece receiver/barrel

Calibres: 6.5 CM, .270, .308 (tested) .30-06, .300 Win Mag, .375 H&H

Barrel length: 56cm (22")

Overall length: 1075mm (42.3")

Magazine capacity: 4

Weight: Approx 3.7kg (8.2lb)

Stock: Polymer with leather inserts on grip, comb and fore-end

Length of pull: 362mm (14.25")

Trigger: Single-stage with set trigger alternative; detachable

Sights: None; integral bases for proprietary Steyr mount

RRP: \$7500

Distributor: Winchester Australia, winchesteraustralia.com.au

The stock has the obligatory Q/D sling swivels. Its butt plate can be rotated to the left to reveal a cavity which can be used to hold cleaning gear and, if required, to store the trigger group.

The receiver, machined from oversize steel bar stock, is cylindrical, profile-milled to an ellipsoid contour yielding both a pleasingly streamlined appearance and a lot of metal at the receiver's mid-section for rigidity. The receiver of my test Monobloc in .308 had a diameter of 34.2mm (1.346") and a length of 203mm (8") before the barrel section tapers off to reach 16.6mm (0.652") at the muzzle.

Like most new rifles, it also has a capped muzzle with 5/8-24 threads for accessories such as muzzle brakes and suppressors.

High on the receiver's sides are four square-shaped, sloped 8mm (0.318") notches which fit Steyr's original proprietary monobloc mount, a Q/D saddle mount with Picatinny rail for Weaver style rings. This, of course, limits



4

the choice of mounts but increases the stability of the scope's mounting, doing away with the very shallow scope base threads found in receivers which have been bored out inside for full-diameter bolts.

There is an 88mm (3.456") ejection port on the right side of the receiver which has a width of 13.5mm (0.532") — too narrow to enable one to

thumb a round into the top of the magazine.

The heart of the rifle is a one-diameter (18mm/.705") bolt with three solid head lugs of uniform size on a symmetrical 120 degree pattern. Each lug is large and deep enough so that they combine to provide adequate strength without multiple rows. For a three-lug array, their layout renders just



ON THIS SPREAD

3 The Monobloc's cocking slide is located on the tang. The button for the bolt lock is behind the bolt handle. The root of the bolt handle acts as a safety lug.

4 Various loads of factory ammo with different bullet weights all shot very well through the Monobloc's unique action.

5 Steel-walled magazine holds four rounds and fits flush with the belly of the stock.



“

about as much contact as is practical in corresponding seats in what would normally be the receiver-ring section.

A bolt-lift of 60 degrees allows enough rotation to overlap the cam bevels and centre the contacting faces for optimum breeching efficiency.

The bolt has a spoon-shaped handle (a round handle is an option) that acts as a fourth

safety lug when its root locks into a slot in the rear of the receiver. The bolt face is deeply recessed and houses a plunger-type ejector. A T-slot extractor 4.6mm (0.180") wide is pinned inside one of the locking lugs.

The bolt is guided in the receiver by two ribs that are joined together at each end and rotate around the bolt body. One rib slides in a

The Monobloc often produced five-shot clusters with all of the bullet holes cutting into each other.”

6



matching runway in the left side of the receiver and the right gains support from the dished edge of the ejection port. This unit acts as the bolt-head lock; to remove the bolt head it's simply rotated 90 degrees counterclockwise to disengage the small catch that secures it in place.

An alloy bolt sleeve enshrouds the rear of the bolt body to help deflect any gases escaping along the body. The rear tip of the firing pin extends a short distance beyond the cocking piece to align with a small opening in the back wall of the bolt sleeve. It doesn't act as a cocking indicator because a red dot on the cocking slide shows up clearly when the rifle is in firing mode.

A small hole located between two locking lugs releases any gas entering the bolt head through the firing pin hole, and any gas flowing back through the bolt body escapes through the cocking



7

cam slot to be deflected by the shrouded bolt sleeve.

The bolt rides smoothly in the round receiver. A knurled button behind the bolt handle is activated automatically in the cocked position to lock the bolt shut. To open the bolt with the safety engaged, simply push the button.

To remove the bolt: drop out the magazine, push down the bolt lock button and lift the bolt handle to free the bolt, then push the cocking slide forward

until the red dot is visible, pull the trigger back and slide the bolt out of the action.

To reinsert the bolt into the receiver, thumb the cocking slide back until the white dot shows, then insert the bolt, rotating it to allow the bolt handle to slide into the receiver.

The Monobloc's drop-out magazine is superb. A recessed latch at the forward portion of the magazine well drops the magazine into your hand. If the rifle is cocked, the

ON THIS PAGE

6 Steyr Monobloc's major component parts: one bolt body, two handles, two bolt heads; one stock with changeable inlays; three magazines to suit different calibres; multiple single-piece barrelled actions of different calibres.

7 Not only are there various stock colour options, plus walnut, you can opt for a range of different-coloured leather inlays for the stock.

box is replaced by moving the cocking slide to its rearmost safety position, after which it clicks home. The bottom of the magazine is heavy, silver-coloured alloy, the sides are chromed steel, and the follower is polymer. It's better looking than many of today's all-polymer magazines.

The .308 magazine holds four rounds, and it fits securely into the rifle flush with the belly of the stock.

If you insert a magazine with the safety button in the de-cocked position, when the bolt is cycled to feed a round into the chamber and the bolt handle is turned down, the bolt will be locked down, the trigger locked, the firing pin in the uncocked position, and the rifle becomes perfectly safe to be carried. To cock the rifle, the cocking slide, which doubles as the safety, must be pushed forward until it engages and a red dot is visible.

ACCURACY RESULTS

Load (Winchester .308)	Velocity (fps)	Group sizes (inches)		
		Smallest	Largest	Average
150gn Defense Tip	2620	.692	.900	.783
150gn Deer Season	2810	.836	1.10	.956
168gn MatchKing	2680	.629	.886	.760
168gn Super Suppressed	1060	.735	.962	.860
Super-X 180gn Power Point	2620	.875	1.08	.930

Notes: the Steyr Monobloc was tested using Winchester factory loads. Accuracy is the average of four 5-shot groups at 100yd from sandbags.

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“

The talented people at Steyr have come up with a cunning combination of beauty and general utility.”

After firing, the safety remains in the firing position and you can cycle the action and shoot as usual, without having to re-cock it.

The Monobloc's trigger with angled guard is excellent. It's a single-set style, and my test rifle came with a crisp and positive 900g (2lb) let-off. Adjustment for weight of pull is set by inserting a small Allen key into a grub screw in the trigger guard. Take care not to screw it in too far or it won't be possible to cock the set trigger.

The blade is pressed forward to set it and it then breaks at 200g (7oz). Once the set trigger is cocked it can be automatically de-cocked by moving the cocking slide to its rearmost 'safe' position. The trigger guard is angled for improved accessibility.

In testing, the Steyr Monobloc came through with flying colours. In all, the rifle ran through approximately 125 rounds of assorted Winchester ammunition and that amount of shooting was made all the more pleasant by the scoped rifle's considerable heft (4.5kg or 10lb) and effective recoil pad.

I didn't fill the magazine when testing; all I had to do was drop a round through the ejection port and, when I

closed the bolt, each round slid smoothly into the chamber.

Chambered for the popular .308 Winchester, the Monobloc showed itself to be capable of sub-MOA accuracy, often producing five-shot clusters with all of the bullet holes cutting into each other.

The Steyr company doesn't specify what kind of accuracy the buyer may expect from the Monobloc for either three-shot or five-shot groups. Having previous experience with a number of different Steyr rifles, however, I was confident the rifle would perform well with all five types of factory ammunition

provided by Winchester.

Not unexpectedly, groups all gave a good indication that this rifle was an Austrian tack-driver. Big Red W's Match load shooting the 150gn MatchKing bullet provided the smallest group of .629", but the 168gn Super Suppressed ran it close with .730. This is a special load, optimised for rifles equipped with suppressors and engineered for noise reduction, decreased fouling in suppressors and reduced recoil.

Winchester's simon-pure hunting loads also surprised: Deer Season 150gn Copper Extreme Point, a mono-metal bullet with a large red plastic

tip and hollow nose cavity designed to accelerate expansion and deliver maximum lethal effect on deer, averaged just under an inch; and Super-X 180gn Power Points averaged .930.

The full accuracy results are listed in the table, which convinces me that the Steyr Monobloc will work well for any application a rifleman might want to set it for, and it will prove to be an outstanding hunting rig. In my estimation, the Monobloc is not only an exceptional design, but one that will satisfy the most demanding connoisseur of fine rifles. 



ON THIS PAGE

8 Steyr Monobloc averaged sub-MOA grouping with five different factory loads. The outfit was tested for accuracy at 100 yards using a benchrest and sandbag rest.

9 Deeply counterbored one-diameter bolt has three large locking lugs in a symmetrical array. The head can be removed in seconds.

10 Butt plate swings to one side, revealing storage cavity which can hold cleaning equipment or the detachable trigger unit.



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Kahles Helia S 8x42 binoculars

Kahles concentrates on the basics and gets them right in the Helia S binos.

THE Helia name is quickly approaching its centenary and still going strong, representing all the experience and quality that Kahles has become famous for. In the Helia S binoculars, it represents simplicity as well, for these hunting binos can't be accused of being flash. They're not overloaded with features, just designed to be strong, reliable and optically excellent.

Perhaps it's for this reason that Kahles still makes the Helia S in Austria instead of outsourcing to either Japan or Myanmar as it has done with its other binoculars, its red-dots and its rangefinders; all Kahles scopes are still made in Austria, too.

Helia S binoculars look very much like a development of Swarovski's discontinued SLC binoculars, which were highly regarded. Kahles is owned by Swarovski so the switch would make sense: why dump



a perfectly good design just because Swarovski released new and different binoculars, when Kahles could carry on with them, making the most of a proven product?

Kahles has managed to put its Helia S out at the same price as the SLCs were, too.

The optics are undeniably good. If you're critical you could complain about the

merest hint of blur and aberration at the very edges of the view but I doubt most people would notice and, besides, these are not \$4000 binos. You do, naturally, get a very sharp image, very good colour definition and the kind of contrast that helps bring out fine details, particularly in animals lurking in the shadows of a heavily wooded area.

The Helia S are well above the norm when you're looking into the glare of a late-afternoon sun. That's when the view through lesser optics will flare out completely. I can only suggest that the internal spec of the Helia S binos is high enough to kill internal reflections and so on, controlling difficult light.

That's the kind of attention



ON THIS SPREAD

1 The Helia S has been designed for hunting with a strong focus on optical quality above all else.

2 Central focus knob also adjusts the dioptre focus.

3 The unique colouring with orange highlights is unmistakable.

4 This cropped shot of the view through the Helia S gives an idea of edge clarity and contrast, though it's impossible to do it justice with a photo that's then printed.



to detail that costs money in manufacturing and justifies the higher retail price.

The 8x42 binoculars have an exit pupil of 5.3mm, a significant advantage in low light compared with the 10x42 set with its 4.2mm pupil. On the other hand, the twilight factor is slightly in favour of the 10x, but I didn't have the two of them to compare in those last few minutes of daylight when it can make the difference.

The optics are housed in a pair of magnesium-alloy barrels but if that material saves a few grams it doesn't make the Helia S light, the 8x42s weighing in at 815g — about medium weight to match their size. The weight gives you faith in their solid construction, and it appears these can be expected to last a very long time. They have a 10-year warranty.

Of course, they're nitrogen filled, waterproof, shock proof and so.

The rubberised outer coating is an attractive brown with two orange highlights curving along the barrels. The binoculars look striking and won't be confused with the millions of black or green binos out there.

They sit well in your hands, with a nice swell and a couple of indents for your thumbs to

sit in — standard stuff but it works well.

The focus wheel fits very closely between the barrels, maximising its diameter. It turns two full revolutions to wind from one end of the focal scale to the other, and with that large-ish knob it means you can very precisely set the focus, something that can make a real difference when you're peering at an indistinct object and trying to find some detail.

The central knob also handles diopter adjustment, altering the right lens to match the left. You pull it out until it clicks, after which any adjustment you make affects the diopter and not the objective focus. Click it back in once it's set and you're right to go.

The eye cups are tough and their multi-step adjustments are each on a very solid detent. You can use these binoculars with or without glasses on. The cups are designed to be unscrewed by simply turning them a bit harder anti-clockwise, allowing you to more easily clean the lenses and clear the mechanism of grit.

The Helia S binoculars come with a typical rubber cover for the eye pieces and a pair of rubber caps for the objective lens that are held on by rubber loops. It's not my favourite way

of attaching lens caps but they do the job.

The binos also come with a neck strap but no case to put them in. I guess Kahles expects that someone spending this much on binoculars will have their own bino harness, which is probably a fair call. Still, a case would be nice.

There's no doubt a bit of a psychological barrier in paying more than \$2000 for a set of binoculars, or for anything, for that matter. If it's true that you should buy the best optics you can afford, and these are within reach of your budget, you won't go wrong with them.

They might not be full of frills but they are very well made and the view is excellent. You know you're putting your money into the things that really count. 

SPECS

Magnification: 8x (and 10x)

Objective lens: 42mm

Exit pupil: 5.3mm (4.2mm)

Twilight factor: 18.3 (20.5)

Field of view:
136m @ 1000m; 7.8° (110m; 6.3°)

Dimensions (L/W/H):
149 (144) x 120 x 63mm

Weight: 815g (785g)

RRP: \$2090 (\$2190)

Contact: kahles.at/en, kahles.sia@swarovski.com

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Hikmicro Stellar SQ50 thermal scope

Traditional rifle scope style
meets thermal imagery.

HIKMICRO offers a large selection of thermal monoculars, rifle scopes, binoculars, clip-ons and accessories. In this test we're looking at the Lynx Pro LH25 monocular and the Stellar SQ50 riflescope. When out shooting at night, it makes good sense to carry a separate thermal monocular, or spotter, to find your quarry, then use a thermal rifle scope on your firearm to shoot with. It's a lot easier to scan an area with a wider-angle spotter, rather than having to look through a bulky, sometimes heavy rifle and scope with a narrow view.

The monocular is one of several models in the Hikmicro range, including the Owl and Gryphon. The Lynx and Lynx Pro are ideal in size and function. The Lynx Pro LH25 is top of the line in this series.

It is quite compact and with minimal buttons to contend with, so very easy to use. There are only four buttons along the top. The first is simply the on/off button. To turn the unit on, press and hold for about 3-4 seconds. To run in standby mode and conserve battery life, press the button for about a second and release. To turn off, press and hold for 3-4 seconds.

The second button is to take still images and record video. Press and release quickly to take still images or press and hold for a few

seconds and the device starts recording, it's that simple.

The third button allows you to change how you view a subject and its surrounds. These colour pallets include black hot, fusion, red hot and white hot. This button also allows you to access the menu, estimate distance and adjust such things as the image and contrast. You can turn on the wi-fi to see the thermal image on a separate device; someone with you can watch on their device while you are looking through the Lynx Pro.

The fourth button is simply the zoom capability, which has 1x, 2x, 4x and 8x digital magnification.

Last but not least, a very small wheel located on the back allows you to adjust the on-screen menu focus, and another wheel on the objective end allows you to focus the image on-screen.

The base of the Lynx Pro also has a tripod screw and a USB port to allow you to charge the device and export files. Fully charged, you should get up to seven hours of continuous running.

Hikmicro offers the Thunder and Thunder Pro thermal rifle scopes that attach via a rail to a firearm, but the Stellar is a bit more traditional, resembling a standard riflescope. The Stellar range consists of four models: the SH35, SH50, SQ35 and SQ50. All four have a



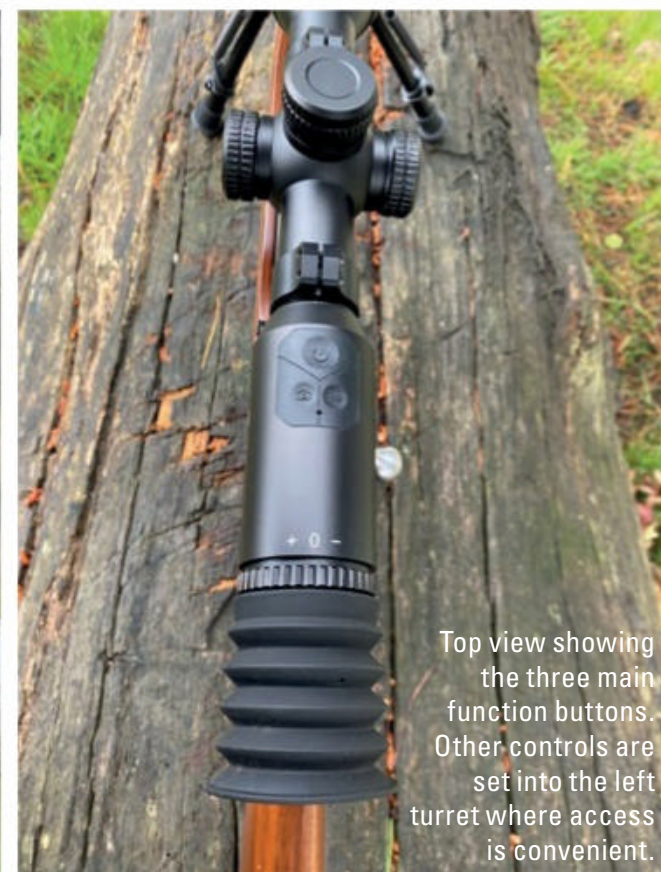
30mm tube construction, so they can be mounted via standard 30mm rings.

The main difference between the SH and SQ models is basically the image sensors. While the SHs offer 384x288 pixels, the SQ series offers higher resolution at 640x512 so the image quality would be noticeably better I'd expect in the SQ; both have 12um pixel size.

The SQ35 has a 35mm objective lens while the SQ50 has a 50mm objective.

The Stellar SQ50 has two internal batteries that will last up to 15 hours. A separate battery compartment houses a single removable CR123A battery for an additional hour's use if you need it.

The three buttons at the top control power, colour pallets and the capture of audio and



Top view showing the three main function buttons. Other controls are set into the left turret where access is convenient.

on my aiming point before then adjusting the crosshairs onto the point of impact. The rifle was zeroed.

The process is a little more complicated than I've made out here but there are online video tutorials that made the whole process a breeze for me.

You can save several different zeroes for different firearms (or different ammunition you may wish to run through the one firearm), as well as different settings for varying ranges. Changing between firearm profiles can only be done through the main menu but selecting a different



The Stellar SQ50 has two internal batteries that will last up to 15 hours."

video. And no, the three turrets are not for sighting in and parallax adjustment. The top one is the spare battery compartment, the right one contains a charging port for the internal batteries and data/video transfer to another device, and the left one is a menu wheel to switch reticles, alter the digital magnification, and enter the menu.

To sight in, I set up a target

at 50m and put a small piece of aluminium tape on the bulls eye that would be visible through the scope. I fired two shots, which grouped high and to the left. Most will tell you one shot is all you require, but a two-shot group will tell you if you are holding steady or not. I then placed a small aluminium foil patch over the group I had just shot and went back to my

rifle to make adjustments.

To do so, I went into the menu using the left turret, selected 'reticle' and set it for 'firearm 1' at 50m. From there, a few more steps through the menu allowed me to freeze the view with the crosshairs

saved reticle or zero distance can be easily changed by simultaneously pressing the capture and pallet buttons on the quick access keys.

Having multiple zero distances saved and quickly accessible eliminates the need



PRODUCT REVIEW



1



2

to estimate holdover on those longer-than-usual shots. The selected firearm profile and reticle zero distance are displayed in the top right corner of the display so you can always confirm your selection before taking the shot.

Out in the field, scrolling through the different colour pallets, I preferred the white hot setting as it seemed to give a little more definition to the animal in the dark. This, coupled with the objective adjustment on the front, gave a relatively clear picture out to about 100-150 metres set on 1x or 2x zoom.

It gradually became slightly pixelated on the higher magnifications out further.

While the Stellar SQ50 riflescope has an extreme detection range of up to 2600 metres, which is far further than most need to see, I personally wouldn't take shots any further than 150 metres at night to ensure I could correctly identify my quarry.

That said, a seasoned hunter will identify the shape of the animal with more confidence and, with Hikmicro's high-quality image sensors, can do so comfortably.

Hikmicro provides a free app for smartphones and other compatible devices to make adjustments, transfer and sync files and lots more, but you can still sight-in, upload files and use these products without downloading the app.

The combination of the Lynx Pro spotter and Stellar SQ50 worked very well. The

compact monocular provided a wide view of the landscape and easily picked out the heat of potential targets, usually with enough clarity to identify the type of animal if the range wasn't excessive.

When I did need a clearer picture, the greater base magnification of the scope

provided it. If it was an animal worth shooting, I could do it confidently and accurately. The traditional scope-like design of the Stellar made its use more intuitive to me, as I'm so familiar with the layout.

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

ON THIS SPREAD

1 The Stellar mounts using standard 30mm scope rings, making it a lot easier to set correctly on a sporting rifle than many of the more conventional thermal scopes.

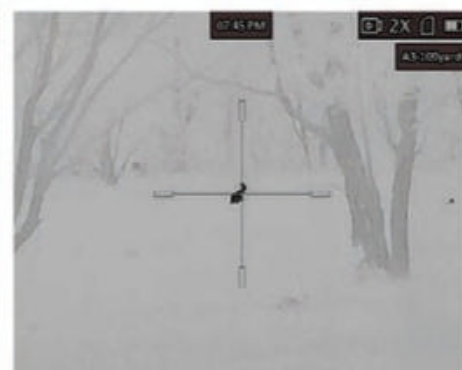
2 Hikmicro's Lynx Pro LH25 monocular provides a good, wide image in a compact handheld unit.

3 A few samples of Stellar SQ50 images showing 1x and 2x zoom; brightness and contrast changes; and black hot versus white hot.

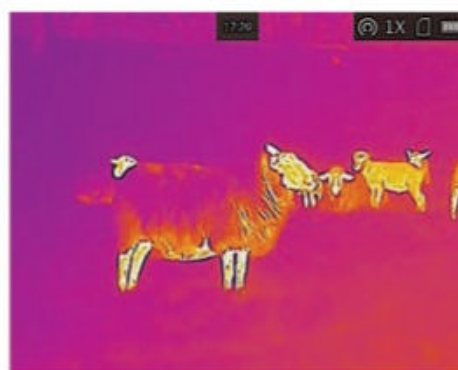
4 The handheld Lynx Pro provides good images. These show three of the colour pallets. At close ranges the detail is very good.



3



4



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Seeing beyond



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Some of the knives we are using leave nothing to be desired.”

since I bought this one about five years ago but I haven't felt the need to update it in that time because it's done everything I need. From weighted hikes for fitness to walking the Kokoda Track; multi-night backpack hunts in Victoria after sambar to single-night trips in my local area; and constantly hauling out meat.

It has had a tough life, despite being well looked after. I enjoy owning the pack and am proud to think about the places it has accompanied me, but the time came recently for me to invest in a new pack as I need more volume to carry all the camera gear I'm lugging around these days. The Exo frame has since been handed on to my wife and we bought a smaller Exo bag to go with it.

When sitting around a campfire and sharing thoughts on favourite bits of gear, it's always the stuff we've had for years and just keeps going that inspires the most passionate discussion.

Like a hat, it's no good until it's properly worn in.

Until next time, enjoy living your wilderlife.

Follow Dylan on Instagram at '@_wilderlife_'

Well-used bits of kit

Happiness is finding the gear that works and lasts

IT'S always fun when you get a new piece of gear and can sit back and appreciate how shiny it is. New toys are fun to muck around with and there is no shortage of different knives, packs and other gadgets that can be had for an outdoorsman.

It's easy to fall in the trap of wanting to try new gear in the constant search to find what

works best for you, but it's also nice to look at some gear you've had for a long time without realising it and be in awe of how much abuse it has copped without ever having skipped a beat.

Due to how much wild game my wife and I process, our knives cop some of the hardest use of all our gear.

A few years ago, I used to buy a new knife every couple of months because I enjoyed experimenting with different designs and steels. To an extent, it is still something I enjoy, but I haven't felt the need to keep looking for different knives lately as some of the ones we are using leave nothing to be desired.

The Featherblade made by Seeker Knives, pictured here, is one of them. It's designed to be small and lightweight, yet it's made from a steel that can handle a lot of abuse. It has probably processed close to 100 animals in the couple of years I've owned it and despite showing signs of use, it still performs perfectly and has years of life left in it yet.

Another piece of gear I've used long-term is my Exo 5500 backpack. There have been a bunch of new models come out



ON THIS PAGE

1 Dylan's favourite pack carried many loads of meat and antlers out of the mountains.

2 This knife has had years of use and still has many years left in it.



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The realities of voting 1

The outcome of the Victorian election is as concerning as it should be educational.

THE results from Victoria's election are in and once again shooters appear to have shot themselves in the foot.

The Dan Andrews-led ALP has secured a comfortable majority in its own right, while the Greens have also secured several seats in both upper and lower houses. They are joined in the upper house by the Animal Justice Party (AJP), which has a seat there as well.

This is not good news for shooters. The Greens and AJP despise hunting and the Victorian ALP is known to be left-leaning, so we're not exaggerating when we say that duck hunting (and other forms of hunting) in Victoria are going to be under renewed pressure for the next few years, even with a Shooters, Fishers and Farmers MP, Jeff Bourman, in the upper house.

We've been saying for decades now that shooters need to stop giving their 1 vote to the major parties and the results of not doing that are going to become pretty clear to licensed gun owners in Victoria.

You don't have to be a mathematical genius to appreciate a lot of ALP (and even Greens) votes came from gun owners. You might not have voted for Dan Andrews, but someone did and statistically quite a few of those someones had gun licences and voted against their own interests.

Real talk, as the kids say: We will never see a situation where a hypothetical Guns, Shooting And Other Stuff You

Like Party gets a parliamentary majority and sweeps away the NFA, returning the land to its joyous state of pre-1996 gun laws.

It's not going to happen, and we're deluding ourselves if we think it will.

What we can do is vote in pro-gun MPs who can advocate for us in parliament — asking questions on notice, voting against anti-shooter legislation, and holding other politicians to account.

In Queensland, Katter's Australian Party (KAP) have done an excellent job of this over the years, helped by the fact they have a range of policies on other issues (they're not a single-issue party) and have the support and trust of their electorates because they truly fight for them, listen to their constituents and stand up for what they believe is right.

Voting for the majors will not bring about positive change for shooters.

We're well aware that many of the pro-gun candidates around the country have some less-than-ideal policies in other areas. The unfortunate reality is, for the most part, there are almost no centre- or left-leaning pro-gun parties. For whatever reason, pro-gun tends to be a stance of the right-leaning political parties.

Again, we know. We can't support parties who don't exist, which puts us in the difficult position of telling people to vote for parties who might have great firearms policies but potentially less great policies in other areas.



Australia's pro-gun parties, including these three, may have significant differences in many policies but they tend to share right-wing policies

We also know a lot of people (sometimes understandably) don't want to support those other policies and end up voting for the majors as a result — leading to outcomes like we've seen in WA (effectively no opposition at all) and Victoria (left-leaning anti-shooting government elected).

It would be great if we could find a centre- or traditionally left-leaning party with pro-gun attitudes, to help shake the idea that to vote pro-gun you have to vote conservative or right-wing, and give shooters more options as to where to cast their votes while still protecting their interests.

In the meantime our advice, which we've been repeating for years, is to give your 1 vote to a pro-shooting candidate then vote for the major party you dislike least after that, and put the Greens and Animal Justice Party at the bottom.

It's simple, it's straightforward, and if everyone with a gun licence followed it, we'd see some real changes for the better to our situation.



We will never see a situation where a hypothetical Guns, Shooting And Other Stuff You Like Party gets a parliamentary majority."



S'IL VOUS PLAÎT

C140 Artisan - Ejector

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More good shooting from John Starr, who sniped these two porkers using Fiocchi's .223 rounds.



Sheridan Howell has been out near Bourke, NSW, with her Weatherby .243 using Fiocchi ammunition. She dropped this goat on the spot.

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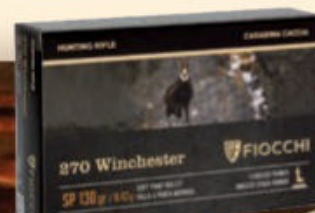
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PLEASE NOTE: this competition is not a game of chance. To achieve entry, photos must be submitted to the satisfaction of the Sporting Shooter editorial team. All entrants must be over 18 years of age and need to be suitably licensed as per individual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



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





Lunchtime score

Anthony Haraldson ducks out of the office for a hunt between meetings.

THE boar I bagged just five minutes from our front door was easily the biggest of my short, amateur hunting career and when it dropped, the magic moment reaffirmed why my wife and I moved our family to the sticks.

When we upped stumps from the suburbs to our rural property in 2018, we knew there would be challenges but we felt strongly about raising our kids in the country. I faced a three-hour daily commute to work and we were forever ferrying the kids to school, footy and soccer, but we knew we'd found home.

Then came COVID.

I began working from home several days a week (thank you, broadband). The extra hours in

my day meant more time with my family. And more hunting.

With five kids under 11, going for a hunt is about getting out when the opportunity strikes, not waiting for the most productive time of day. Dusk, when pigs and the occasional fallow are out, coincides with witching hour in our house — dinner, bath, bed.

Fortunately, I can hunt where I live and, thanks to great neighbours, have access to the surrounding properties. I can pop out and be looking down my scope while the computer screen in the home office is still warm.

This was the case when I headed out for this lunchtime hunt. I went into a neighbouring property comprising native

bush and wet, lush gullies meandering to open pasture. It's a beautiful spot that had been getting smashed by wild pigs.

My hunting mate, who has game cameras everywhere, shared footage of a small herd on the previous weekend at this same spot.

I walked up one gully that had some fresh and old diggings. As I reached the top of a spur, I heard an almighty grunt. Wow, I thought, trying to catch my breath from the walk up the hill. I ducked into a lightly wooded area to look down to the next gully where I saw three boars, one of which was a monster.

As it was my mate who alerted me to the herd, I decided to retreat and give him a call. He lives 15 minutes away and, once he arrived, we stalked back to the vantage point. The pigs were about 40 metres from us. They were too interested in digging their snouts into the sodden ground to notice us.

I rested my rifle, a .243 loaded with Fiocchi 100g soft points, in the fork of a tree and lined up the largest of the three boars. My mate lined up one of the smaller specimens. I took a couple of breaths and boom! Clean shot just behind the shoulder. The big guy dropped instantly.

A split second later, my mate dropped one of the pigs with a similar shoulder shot, then the third boar as it ran off.

A successful lunchtime hunt with my biggest boar kill ever ... and back to the computer in time for my next meeting. 📺

THANKS TO



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Shooting skill trumps the calibre

Shooting bigger is no substitute for shooting better. Sometimes it's even detrimental.



THE main topic for argument among hunters gathered around a campfire concerns the effectiveness of various calibres. One man who has successfully hunted every size game animal with a 7mm Mauser swears by it. But he's no sooner aired his opinion than another chap airs his view and condemns the 7x57mm, claiming that it isn't powerful enough for red deer, let alone sambar.

This is when all the other shooters start taking sides. Soon a heated argument is taking place — and a more fruitless subject is hard to imagine.

The difference, of course, lies not in the cartridge or the rifle, but in how it was used, by whom and under what conditions. Right from the start, it should have been obvious to these guys that where you hit your game is far more important than what you hit it with.

A .284 bullet landed in the vital heart-lung area carries a lot more authority than a far more powerful .338-calibre projectile that only breaks a leg or lands in the paunch. Furthermore, the hunting ability and shooting skill of the person aiming the musket is far more important than the rifle itself.

A cool, calm, deliberate marksman can hunt the largest big game with a relatively light-calibre rifle and score clean, one-shot kills without ever losing a single one wounded. The same rifle in the hands of a less experienced hunter, one who is likely to get excited and lose his cool, may do more wounding than killing.

My old friend, the late Len Richardson, racked up an enviable tally of one-shot kills on large, tough sambar stags, using a .243 Winchester. The mild ballistics of the Remington 75gn Powerlokt load he

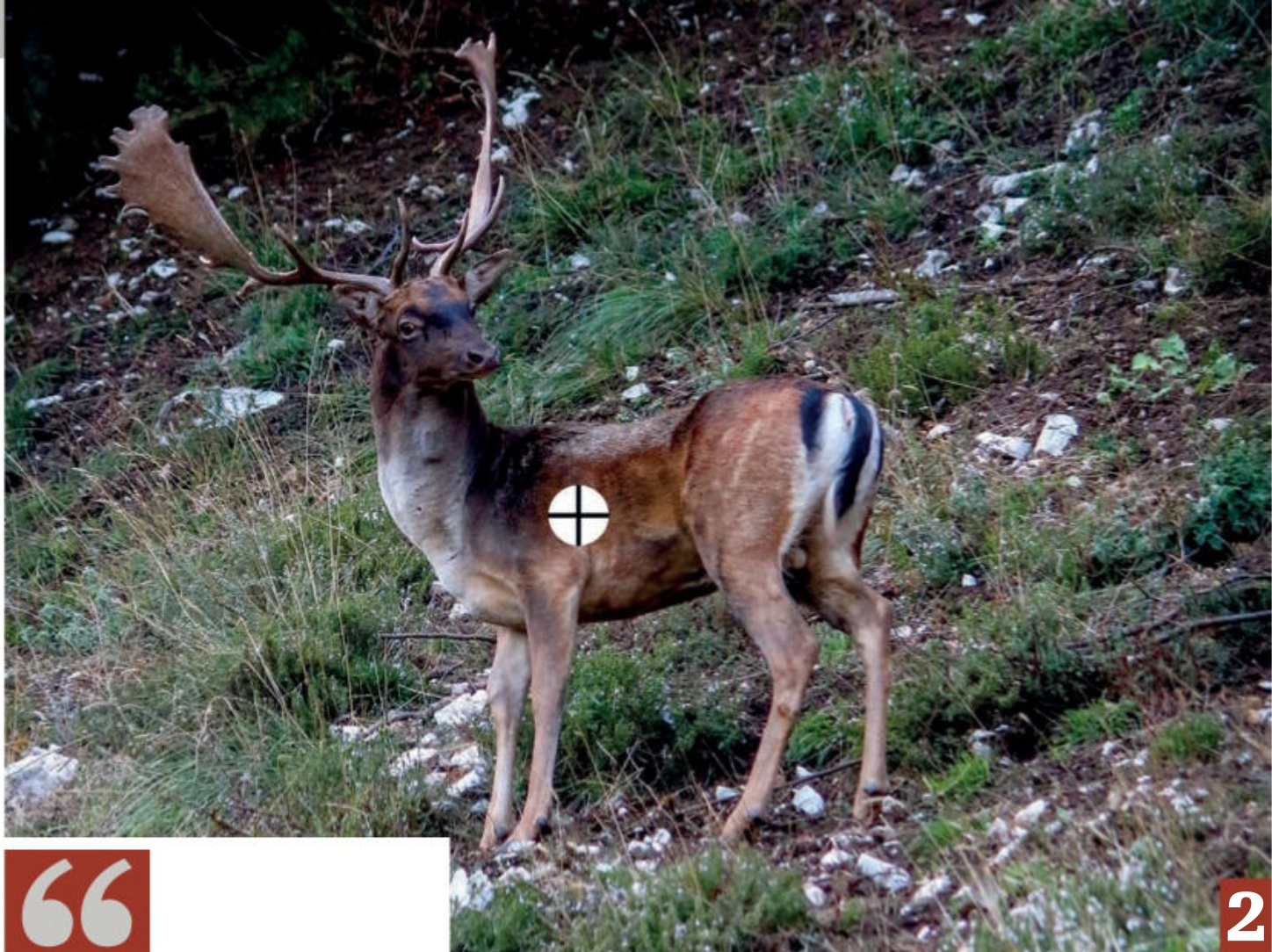
preferred were no handicap to Len, who was an expert stalker, a fine bushman and a good shot. He admitted he was very sensitive to recoil and that his rifle would be less than adequate in average hands. But he was a terrific offhand shot and had the ability to stalk close enough to his wary quarry to place each shot where it would do the most good.

He told me he never took a shot at over 100 yards and passed up running shots. His philosophy closely parallels my own, which says that whenever you can you should take advantage of a hastily assumed



rest or drop into the sitting position. If by chance brush obscures your view, hold off shooting, patiently look for an opening or wait until the animal moves and offers a clear shot. Otherwise, you might be able to move into a more favourable position, if the footing is not too noisy and allows it.

If the animal spooks and goes tearing off through the brush, don't risk a shot needlessly, because chances are the animal lives somewhere in the vicinity and will often be found in the same area. It is better to forget this animal temporarily and



“

The most difficult shot to try for is a head-shot. The brain is hard to hit.”

move on to look for another.

You don't want to chase a wounded deer or disturb any other deer that may be nearby by firing a wild shot. Only shoot at an animal when you are certain of making a clean kill.

Evidently, the chap who hunts deer with a 7x57 has found the cartridge ideal under most conditions, but he probably recognises its limitations and wouldn't recommend it to the average shooter as the ideal deer rifle.

The old maxim that if an animal is hit right with anything like an adequate calibre, then a kill is the result, still holds good. But the game doesn't always stand around posing nicely side-on waiting to be shot. If an animal is browsing and moving about partially obscured by foliage or brush, it is going to be difficult to place a bullet with any degree of certainty. It is better to sit and wait for the chance of a clear shot.

The smart hunter generally chooses the largest calibre they can comfortably handle; one capable of driving a bullet of reasonable weight fast enough to shoot flat over normal game ranges and deliver a knock-down punch to the largest game likely to be hunted. Undeniably, this is a sensible approach.

Some hold to the extreme view that even a .22 rimfire bullet, if landed in a vital area, will kill the biggest deer. This may be true, but how often can we be sure of placing an effective shot to the brain with a .22? Under present day hunting conditions, I'd say almost never and if a vital spot is missed the result is bound to be a wounded animal. Arguably, the minimum calibre should probably be 6mm with a stoutly structured 100gn bullet.

The most difficult shot to try for is a head-shot. If the brain is hit it results in instantaneous death, but the game's head seldom remains still and the brain is hard to hit. Even meat hunters prefer to target the heart-lung area, which destroys very little edible venison.

The neck shot is fairly effective at short range. But if the spine, the jugular or a bunch of nerves at the base of the neck are missed, it is no

better than a shot in any other mass of flesh, and even a gut-shot can be just as effective. However, I have seen animals knocked down with a neck shot, then struggle to get up, but seldom are they able to regain their feet. In most instances, you'll have time to deliver a finishing shot.

The shoulder shot is a favourite with those who hunt dangerous game and want to ruin its means of locomotion in order to forestall an imminent charge. Breaking both shoulders will put down a buffalo and render it helpless without killing it, but wreck even one shoulder and it will slow him down from pressing home his charge.

On non-dangerous game such as deer, however, the shoulder shot spoils a lot of good eating meat, but if it strikes low may break a leg and result in a long

ON THIS SPREAD

1 The experienced hunter takes advantage of any hastily assumed rest that offers stability for the shot.

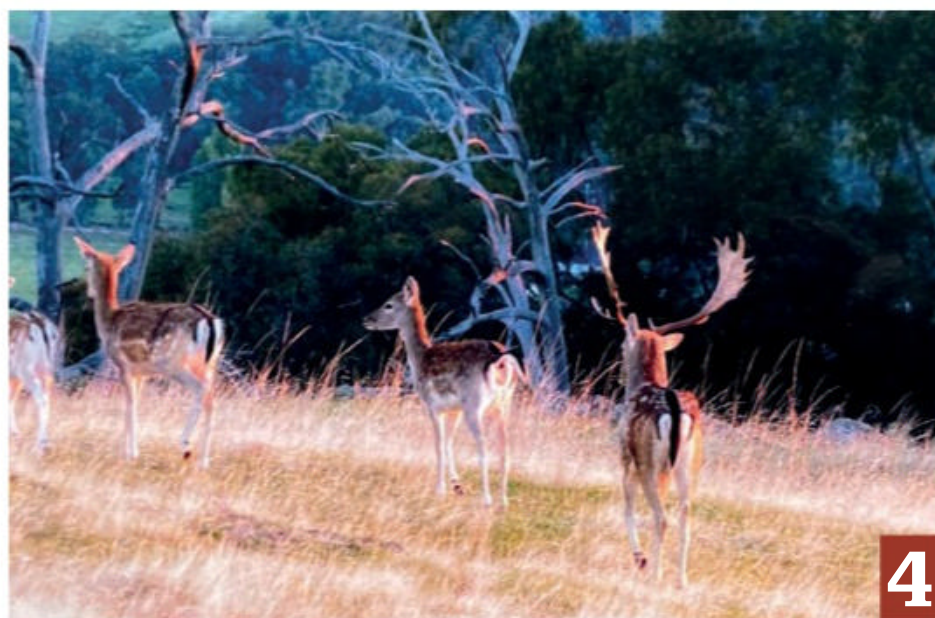
2 The classic kill shot is taken at the heart-lung area behind the shoulder on a deer standing nicely side-on.



trailing job. The best spot to aim for is the area just behind the shoulder. Major organs vital to sustaining life are located there, mainly the heart and lungs. As a rule, any expanding bullet penetrating the chest not only destroys these vital organs, but disrupts the entire nervous system, usually resulting in an instant kill.

A bullet that pierces the lungs but misses the heart doesn't act as fast. Usually the animal will manage to cover a short distance before it drowns in its own blood. A bullet that lands low will often hit the heart and the animal will go tearing off in a mad rush for a short distance before suddenly dropping in its tracks.

The heart-lung area being so big allows a fair amount of latitude in aiming. If the bullet lands too high it will break the



spine, if too low, it will wreck the heart, while a bullet that lands too far forward may break the shoulders or neck. The advantage of the chest shot is that little or no meat is destroyed.

A hit too far back in the paunch may not kill unless the rifle is an exceptionally powerful one, but it should disable the game and slow it up long enough for a follow-up shot before it gets out of sight. A gut-shot animal may hunch up and run a long way even when hit with an adequate calibre.

Regardless of an animal's position — how it is standing and the direction it is facing — always try to drive your bullet into the chest cavity, even on an angling shot. If you succeed, a

quick kill is guaranteed.

One type of shot often encountered is at an animal running directly away from the hunter. It's a fairly straightforward shot with no lead required, but with a small-calibre rifle you need a stout bullet that will penetrate deeply. One of the mono-metal designs is a good choice for rear-end raking shots, as light soft-points simply won't get the job done.

In my experience the performance of standard rifles in the .270/.30-06 class is adequate for all-round hunting, and a practical minimum for deer except sambar is a .25-calibre shooting at least a 100gn bullet. A magnum is seldom

“

A shooter who cannot place shots with a .270 or 7mm can hardly be expected to do better with a more powerful calibre.”

needed, but I won't criticise any man who can handle one.

Power in a rifle is no substitute for lack of skill in handling one. A shooter who cannot place shots with a .270 or 7mm can hardly be expected to do better with a more powerful calibre. An inexperienced shooter's performance with a hard-kicking magnum is painful to watch.

In most cases I think it is better for the less experienced shooter to choose a light-recoiling, pleasant-to-shoot rifle and learn how to use it to the best advantage before getting anything bigger. If they take care to shoot only at standing game and to pass up any doubtful shots, to place their bullets as well as they can, to kill as cleanly possible, they're on the right track. But their rifle must have enough hitting power, so that if the bullet is slightly misplaced, chances are it will disable the game long enough to finish it off and not let it run away wounded.

Too many of us are velocity happy these days. The blame for a lot of failures can be slated home to the use of light, frangible bullets driven at excessively high speed. It is better to choose a heavier, ballistically efficient bullet that will retain sufficient velocity and energy to handle any target within reasonable shooting distance. ☒

ON THIS PAGE

3 The sitting position is easy to assume, steadier than kneeling or offhand and well suited in situations where it is difficult to shoot from prone.

4 This deer running straight away offers two possible shots: low on the back of the neck or straight up the Khyber Pass.



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FALLOW DEER



Zeke finally strikes it lucky — 20 years after his first fallow buck expedition! David Hughes recounts the hunt.



The rewards of patience

PENFOLDS, the famous wine company, publishes a book called *The Rewards of Patience* which extols the virtues of the winery's various world-renowned wines as they age in the cellar. Many of their top labels can be drinking magnificently after 20 years in the bottle. As with aging of wine, hunting experiences can be especially savoured if many years of effort are expended before grassing a truly exceptional trophy.



ON THIS SPREAD

1 Now that is a set of antlers! They don't come much better from wild populations in Australia where not supplemented with farm genetics.

2 The rewards of patience. It didn't just take time, but it meant passing up a lot of other bucks. Zeke, Anton and David share the moment after success.

FOR my hunting mate Zeke, the Tassie fallow deer season rewarded 20 years of patient endeavour with a once-in-a-lifetime trophy.

We were all smiles as we drove off the boat with the HiLux loaded to the gunnels for yet another annual deer-stalking effort. It was wonderful to be back in Tasmania, enjoying the crisp, clean air, the abundant wildlife and the amazing variability of the weather. Some days might be warm and sunny, but for sure a south-westerly system would roll in, bringing mist

and rain that might last for days. The possibility of snow was not out of the question, even in March.

Our first morning dawned fine and clear. We enjoyed a stalk as the sun came up, but the buck that we had glimpsed first-up eluded us.

We covered plenty of territory during the rest of the day as we tried to figure out where the deer were hanging out. We were seeing them regularly, but not the type with advanced headgear.

Thick, dank mist greeted us next

day. Heavy overcast, drizzle and rain kept us company for the rest of our stay.

One day while driving about the expansive property on dusk, we encountered a few scattered deer here and there. On such an occasion, a doe with accompanying large fawn crossed the track some distance in front of the vehicle, then obliged by standing still just long enough for Zeke to line it up with his customised Ruger M77 .30-06. The doe crumpled immediately to a perfect hit through the shoulders

with the Remington Core-Lokt 150gn PSP projectile. Later, we'd see that the top of its heart had been taken out. Nothing like a satisfying one-shot kill to open the account.

Another morning as we skirted a slope thick with hip-high bracken fern, Zeke spied the tops of some antlers poking above the dense undergrowth. The buck didn't look like a shooter, but we thought that he might have some bigger mates with him, lurking unseen.

We sat for maybe an hour, carefully glassing the surrounding area. The buck did eventually stand up and mooch around a bit, which confirmed he was not up to the standard we had set. Ultimately, we concluded the creature was on his own, so we quietly retreated the way we had come.

Later, we spotted a very large mob of deer camped out in the middle of a wide open valley. They were sheltered from the wind and also able to soak up a bit of warmth from sunny breaks in the generally inclement weather. We made a long, slow stalk which, in the final metres, involved belly crawling. We made it to the lip of the valley and from about 400 metres glassed the mob carefully.

ON THIS SPREAD

3 Zeke shot this pretty buck in 2007, along the way to securing the big one.

4 In the 2017 season, Zeke took this interesting head. Collectible, but abnormally asymmetric.

5 One of the major buck-stalking challenges was avoiding the small mobs of deer that kept popping up.

3



There were literally scores of deer all bedded or grazing contentedly. There were a couple of bucks which might have been nudging our eligibility criteria but not enough to excite us to try our luck stalking closer.

The field intelligence gathered by other hunters suggested a particular valley was holding a number of good bucks. We'd not looked there,

but since we weren't having any luck closer to the hut, for our afternoon hunt on the fourth day we elected to give it a try.

The wind was blowing a cold westerly as we drove to a hilltop spot where we'd need to walk into the wind for about a kilometre in order to reach the eastern edge of the valley we were targeting. The sky was heavily overcast with





“

It was wonderful to be back in Tassie, enjoying the crisp, clean air.”

4

intermittent drizzle. Conditions were bleak and uncomfortable but quite good for stalking. Our mate Anton had also joined us for the hunt. It would be Zeke's shot if a buck presented.

The rim of the valley wall was clad in sparse wattle and gums. Our strategy was to use the wattles for cover while we thoroughly glassed the other side of the valley. It was perhaps 200 metres from our viewing position to the valley floor, stretching out to 500 metres-plus toward the top of the opposite side. The field of view was patchy through the timber so it was hard to say with any certainty what deer were about, but we could see quite a few. Most were does and immature males. Some were feeding and some bedded.

Time passed, as did a few scudding showers.

The silence was suddenly broken by an urgent hissed outburst from Anton: “I've got your buck right there!”

He'd spotted a whopping bedded buck across the valley. It had great-looking headgear, but it was too far to see properly in the dim grey light. Zeke needed to get closer to be more confident with the shot. Leaving me where I was, watching, and with radio contact if needed, he and Anton belly-

crawled down the hill, aiming for the next bunch of trees. After a short while, their laboriously slow crawl came to a halt because of mounting concerns that their line of stalk would be in view of the buck.

To complicate matters, another mob of deer had wandered close to the pair, with consequent risk of spooking them and in turn alarming our target.

Zeke set up his bipod where they were, and waited for the buck to stand up. He put the crosshairs of his Burris Eliminator scope about where he anticipated the beast's shoulder would be when it rose from its bed. The Eliminator was indicating the range as 369 metres.

The waiting game was tense and uncomfortable. The intermittent drizzle meant that periodically binocular and scope lenses needed a wipe. It was finger-numbing cold because of the wet conditions and wind chill. Zeke's neck started cramping because of the long minutes with his eye glued to the scope. Occasionally, he needed a spell to get the blood moving again — even though breaks in attention came with a risk of missing a vital, fleeting moment when a shot became available.

Anton's infinitely experienced eye kept gauging the beast and was



5

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6



off the trigger before the buck could take another step. The animal wheeled abruptly and hurtled downhill, before disappearing behind a small wattle.

Moments of confusion ensued. Was it a hit or not? Nothing moved. After the shot, Anton was sure that he'd followed the deer in his binoculars and had briefly seen legs up in the air. From afar it was all a bit dim and distant. Zeke decided to get up and cover the intervening distance as quickly as possible, telling me on the walkie talkie to follow.

Anton was a few metres ahead of Zeke and spotted the buck, lying behind the wattle where he'd disappeared. Ready to shoot in case he stood up, Zeke approached very slowly, but the buck wasn't going anywhere. The shot was right through the engine room, on the point of aim.

The weather gods had teamed up with the hunting gods, it seemed, because the clouds parted right on dusk, providing a beautiful sunset glow for some photos to appropriately record the occasion.

Zeke's smile was going to take an angle grinder to remove! He had been doggedly in pursuit of this beast for so many years that the final result was sweet beyond contemplation.

Later when the tape came out, the antlers scored only a couple of points below the field-guesstimated 250 Douglas. For Zeke and me, fair dinkum trophy heads for wild Tassie fallow start at about 220 Douglas. He had seen me shoot three bucks in that category, but a big one had always eluded him. He'd shot a half dozen decent heads, and had a couple mounted, but the big one had remained tantalisingly out of reach – until now.

The rewards of patience were finally there to be savoured – just like a 20-year-old Grange Shiraz. ☺

“

There were literally scores of deer all bedded or grazing contentedly.”

confirming a 250-class Douglas rack. If Zeke did his job, this would be the reward for 20 years of patient stalking.

A number of deer walked up between the watching pair and the focus of their intense scrutiny. This added to the stress level because of the risk of shielding the buck if it stood and began to mooch off. Thankfully, all of the intervening animals moved on.

With the failing light ebbing even more, Zeke was toying with calling me on the radio to ask me to stand the animal up with a yell.

All of a sudden it stood of its own volition, took a couple of steps to the left, and then stopped. Ready in the shooting position, Zeke touched



7

ON THIS PAGE

6 Zeke was delighted with the haul of venison.

7 This doe crumpled immediately to a perfect hit through the shoulders. A nice meat animal.

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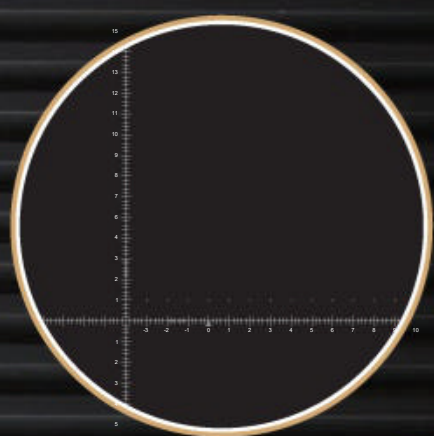
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**CAPE
YORK**



MAIN: A famously toothy Cape York grin.

RIGHT: The razorbacks here provide trophy-class ivory.



Peter Jackson explains why Cape York and Kendall River Safaris have become his favourite destinations.

Promises kept

I COULD barely make out Steve's vehicle through the sheets of bulldust thrown up by the passing vehicles high-tailing it down the Cape York Eastern Development Road. Despite his headlights being on high beam, they appeared as little more than a smudge in my shaking rearview mirror as I rumbled over the endless corrugations. My friend was indeed getting his Cape York 'baptism in dust' as we steadily rolled towards our destination hundreds of kilometres away.



THE nine-hour drive from my home base in Cairns towards Kendall River Hunting and Fishing Safaris puts you on notice that you are heading towards one of the remotest hunting locations in the country.

This trip had been a long time coming.

For years Kendall River Safaris had been the subject of story and song as I relayed some of my experiences to my old mate. Sure, over time some of the pigs may have grown in size and ferocity

and the odd barra may have gained an extra kilo to match the added centimetre or two, but hey, I'm getting old and I cannot remember every single detail.

Steve had been living in Papua New Guinea for nearly 15 years and is no slouch on the end of a fishing rod, spending his time depleting the rivers of metre-plus barra and reel-destroying black bass with regular monotony. However, getting back out in the field to hunt was an itch that needed scratching.



I had promised him that by hook or by crook, we would put in some time up the Cape, with Kendall Lodge the venue of choice. COVID had put those plans on hold for nearly two years until Steve and his lovely family made the move and settled in Cairns after the travel bans were lifted.

After being drip-fed a diet of images of monster hooky boars and video from the Kendall River Facebook page, Steve was chafing at the bit to head to Cape York and start stacking bacon. Fortunately, the

2



“

If it is not tiled, chlorinated, fenced and filtered, I'm not swimming in it.”

oncoming monsoonal wet season was still weeks away and contending with dust beats winching vehicles out of the mud every time. The remaining dry season is a blessing for those heading north to hunt Cape York razorbacks.

The northern waterholes are still drying up in October and the hogs will generally roam from swamp to swamp in large numbers in search of water and cooler creek beds to evade the 38-degree temperatures and high humidity.

The Cape York razorback is a nasty breed and seems to be referred to as a standalone variety among feral pig breeds. Highly unpredictable, it is a formidable opponent in the bush, with some models weighing in at 120 kilos and sporting large tusks. The Cape

boars typically sport a solid, thickset head, long snout and powerful shoulders that often display scarred battling pads from brawls with other hogs, all attached to a powerful body that can hit the turbocharger in a short burst of astoundingly high speed.

If that was not enough, they often have a thick coating of mud that acts as nature's own ballistic armour and has the ability to foil even the best placed rounds.

They do not have it all their own way in the north. Although they do seem to rule the environment, they have to share it with wild mobs of scrub cattle and, of course, saltwater crocodiles, which are in large numbers up there. Salties have been allowed to proliferate over the past 50 years and are now such a huge threat that northern hunters treat most waterways and lagoons with caution.

Speaking personally, if it is not tiled, chlorinated and does not have a fence and a filter, I'm not swimming in it.

You can tell a billabong that has a large incumbent croc as there are

ON THIS SPREAD

1 Quick-shooting rifles, low-magnification scopes and high-capacity magazines are very handy tools for this kind of hunting.

2 Dylan Adams, Kendall River guide and possible hunting Jedi, according to Peter.

3 Trophies dry on the roof. There are plenty of good ones up the Cape.

no wildlife tracks leading to the water's edge save for that of an immature wallaby or kangaroo that has not learnt to stay away.

The concept of culling crocs has been on the table for decades now but, despite fatal attacks on humans, the problem has remained unresolved by governments. Guess there are not enough votes in it just yet.

Scrub bulls, or Micky bulls, populate the Kendall River property, which covers some 880,000 acres of almost untouched bush. These once-domestic, now feral bulls have a dim view of, well, everything and everyone. These guys weigh in at nearly a ton and are extremely bad tempered and require some big lead to put them down.

They have been known to attack and flip ringers off their quad bikes during the mustering season and have sent more than a few to the hospital after putting an extra hole in them with their horns. In serious need of some sort of anger management counselling, they will stand there eyeballing you, tossing their head and stamping their feet while looking for the shortest distance through the scrub to do you some harm.

This was my fourth year heading up to Kendall River Safaris with varying results. I love it up here in our wild north and what hunter wouldn't? Sure, it is basic, but basic is good enough. If you are looking for a mint on the pillow and turn-down service, well, this is



“

I love it up here in our wild north and what hunter wouldn't?"

good old-school hunting, Aussie style, so apologies in advance.

The accommodation is basic. You have a bed, clean linen and your own shower and toilet in the room. At the end of a day's hunt, and after a few beers and a meal, it may as well be the Hilton by the time your head hits the pillow.

Hunting in northern Australia is a hot, dusty business and you need a reasonable level of fitness. The guides will work around you, your needs and your fitness level. I was offered this advice: you can kid the guide, you can kid your companions and you can even kid yourself, but

ON THIS PAGE

4 Steve lines up a shot with his pump-action .30-06.

5 Sows and piglets move away, oblivious to the hunters' presence.

at the end of the day, the Kendall River bush will tell you the truth.

The day starts at dawn with breakfast followed by a check on all your gear, before loading up into the tough but battered safari vehicle for the drive to the first of many hunting hotspots on the property. Decamping from the vehicle, you start the walk in and are quickly enveloped by the thick scrub.

This is absolutely not a place to wander off and do your own thing, not that you need to. Dylan Adams, our guide, has an almost encyclopaedic knowledge of the area. He carries a little more than just his broad knowledge, too: a GPS, sat phone and snake-bite kit.

Oh yeah, did I mention snakes? I can deal with rampaging bulls, upset razorbacks and saltwater crocodiles, but snakes bring out the Indiana Jones in me — the fear of snakes, not the treasure-hunting! I am not a fan of them and for good reason.

We were briefed to be mindful of taipans and king browns. The king brown will tag you if you upset it, but mostly will part company without a fuss. This I can do. The coastal taipan, however, will actively hunt you down and tag you as many times as it can, even if you run away. This I am not so keen on.

Around the campfire, Dylan shared a yarn about an incident on a nearby station where a young jackaroo had gone to start the water pump in a shed near the homestead. Just on dark and carrying out the task with a flashlight, he disturbed a taipan that immediately struck at him, hitting him in his heavy



5

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ON THIS
PAGE

6 When checking out a lagoon for pigs, you stand well back from the edge in case there's a croc.

7 You'd be mad not to do a bit of fishing while you are up there.



“

It is not uncommon to surprise big hogs snoozing in the cool.”

woollen work sock. The snakes' fangs became entangled in the weave of his sock.

The jackaroo commenced the taipan two-step, a little-known Outback dance with fairly simple steps and no rhythm: one foot is planted on the ground while the other foot shakes the highly venomous snake backwards and forwards trying to hurl the hooked-up reptile into the nearby bush.

No music is required, but I understand it comes with lyrics provided by the startled dancer that don't bear repeating here.

After catapulting the angry snake into the bush, the jackaroo thought the ordeal was over. Not so. Seems the Taipan wanted to dance some more, coiling and striking repeatedly, chasing the poor fellow while he fled the scene. Fortunately, the snake eventually called off the attack.

The lesson here? Consider investing in a set of snake gaiters and protect yourself while hunting in northern Australia.

As you commence your stalk into the swamp areas, you are on high

alert. Boars have been known to dig a wallow so deep that their back can just be seen above the loose, dark soil, camouflage that is enhanced by the shade of low-hanging branches. They might dig their hole into the underside of a fallen tree.

It is not uncommon to surprise big hogs snoozing in the cool and it offers some heart-stopping moments requiring fast shooting.

Making things even trickier is that the wind shifts with such regularity that it is difficult to maintain a favourable direction.

Steve and Dylan surprised a small mob of wallowing pigs, steadily moving to within 15m of them before giving them the good news with a dual combination of 30.06 and .375-caliber rounds. A great debut for Stephen and his first kill at Kendall River, with a nice 70kg model.

Early morning and late afternoon are prime for hunting Kendall pigs, so you may be wondering what to do with yourself between times. Easy. Grab one of the many fishing rods and hit the river with your guides at the helm of the water craft. The Kendall River is teeming with barramundi and its cousin, the saratoga. Barra are a spectacular fighting fish and an outstanding table fish to boot.

Just a tip, however: if you're going for a fish, take your guns. A visiting father-and-son team dropped four pigs while travelling to the boat ramp!

I think of Kendall River Safaris as being honest to goodness, back to basics, old-school Aussie hunting at its finest. Spectacular outback sunsets, cold beers around a campfire, listening to authentic hunting yarns, all wrapped around sensational, edge-of-your-seat hunting and fishing in a rough, wild environment that takes no prisoners.

It took a few years, but I got to keep my promise to my mate Steve. In turn, he is planning to take his eldest lad Aiden up for his very first hunting trip. 📍

CONTACT

To learn more about Kendall River Hunting and Fishing Safaris and to contact safari manager Jason Knack, visit kendallriversafaris.com.

 **FAST
FACTS**
Monster croc

At Kendall River recently, a guest shot a 70kg sow adjacent to a watercourse that was home to a 5m saltwater croc. The next day they returned to the location to try their luck again with pigs only to find the carcass had gone.

Here's the kicker: The croc had come up during the night, grabbed the sow and 'forklifted' it back across the road and into the water with it in its mouth. There were no drag marks or signs of effort on the croc's behalf, just a broad, flattened grass path and massive footprints leading back into the billabong.

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Taking Ted

Reid Hjorth heads out after pigs to show his son what hunting is all about.

Ever since my young bloke was born, I've been keen to get him out into the Aussie bush to experience what hunting is all about. Sure, we'd talked hunting and he grew up seeing heads in my trophy room, but I felt like I had to get the timing right with his personality to make sure the first hunting trip was good for both of us.

TED started asking, "Dad, can I come hunting, too?" Once this became a regular question, I knew he was keen enough and the time was just about right.

I didn't want his first experience to be a dud, game wise, so I waited until I knew some particular apple trees were dropping fruit and that the chance of nailing a pig or two was high.

With the all clear and good luck from the farmer, I buckled Ted into his seat and answered a million questions that could only come out of a four-year-old's mouth. It may have been my bad answers or the long 40-minute drive, but the little fella was asleep before we hit the front gate, which gave me enough time to sort everything out and be ready for the arvo hunt.

Ted was totally out for the count and it took a lot to wake him.

"You ready to go hunting mate?" I asked.

"Yep!" he replied eagerly.



Simply having binoculars brings Ted deeper into the hunt as a participant rather than a tagalong.





“

With his batteries recharged, he was bouncing all over the place and as excited as hell.”

With his batteries recharged, he was bouncing all over the place and as excited as hell.

“Shoot a pig, Dad, shoot a pig!”

The pressure was on. After a failed hunt, it’s easy to explain to a new hunter why you’d shot nothing or weren’t successful, but no explanation makes sense to a kid’s little brain, so I had to make it happen. I wanted the experience to be a great one from start to finish and make him want to come back for more; to want to be out there with me, father and son, enjoying what hunting is all about.

But first, a safety lesson. With bolt removed and pretending to fire, I explained where he could and couldn’t go and that he must stay behind me at all times.

“I know, Dad, I know,” he chipped in.

Haha, we’ll see, I thought.

To make my life easier, I stuck my blaze orange cap on his head, which he thought was the coolest thing ever. I gave him an old pair of binos and this kid was ready to go.

The easterly wind forced us to drive right past the apple trees and park the ute 200m away, then stalk back in on them. I knew where the pigs would come from. We were only half way there and I could see

three pigs already homing in on the apples.

Trying to hurry up a four-year-old who wants to pick up every stick and rock and know the whys of everything, while also trying to keep his excited voice down, is a task in itself.

“Come on mate, the pigs are coming, let’s go,” I said.

“Where? I want to see with my binos. Will you shoot the pig, Dad? Will the rifle be loud, Dad? Oh no, Dad, I left my toy gun and ear muffs in the car.” Ted kept on talking as I pulled him along, trying to get us into position.

As the pigs got closer, so did some inquisitive cattle who saw us drive through and came over for an easy feed, I reckon. With Ted in my ear telling me to shoot and the cows milling about, the pigs were frightened off and ran around the hill.

“Why didn’t you shoot them,

Dad?” Ted asked, somewhat confused.

Explaining bullet pass-throughs and not shooting near stock was enough to settle him down but it didn’t slow him down.

“Come on, Dad, let’s go get them.”

Bugger it, why not? The wind was still right and they didn’t know we were there, really, so off we went, Ted as determined as ever.

Cresting the hill, I spied the three pigs down in the long grass. The height we had was good enough to see down into it and at about 120 metres away, we were close enough.

“Righto mate, stay behind me, fingers in your ears and don’t move, OK?”

The smile on his face, head nod and the double thumbs up before he jammed them in his ears was confirmation enough that he knew what was about to happen. I wasted no time in letting off a round from the .270 into the biggest pig, a sow.

“You got him, Dad, you got him!” yelled Ted.

I told him to stay still while I tracked the others through the scope and managed to drop one more as it crossed a clear gap in the grass. Ted was absolutely beaming with excitement and his voice had seriously gone up some decibels as he described what just happened.

We approach the pigs and curiosity took hold of him. He asked lots of questions, poked the dead pigs and even invented the new sport of pig jumping as he took it all in.

On the walk back to the ute, Ted led the way. We ate fresh blackberries off the bush, a quail exploded from under his feet and a wedge-tailed eagle circled right above the D-Max. The cows chased the ute as we raced to the next gate, much to Ted’s enjoyment.

Taking Ted was a huge success. He did everything asked of him, learnt heaps and had a ball doing it. I loved the fact that he seemed to be living his best life for every minute of it.

If you’re thinking of doing the same with your own kids, I encourage you to do it. You won’t regret it. Just be ready for a ton of questions.

ON THIS PAGE

1 Reid was pleased and relieved that he shot a pig on Ted’s first hunt.

2 There’s nothing happening so Ted does what little kids do, building energy for later.

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SPECIES GUIDE: CHITAL DEER

An excellent chital trophy but beware, as they can look bigger than they really are when they're on the hoof.





Australia's most beautiful

With their good looking hides, chital are both desirable and difficult to get. Jared Matthews has the low-down.

Most people regard chital as the prettiest deer species of our Australian six. I first hunted them in 2013 up in north Queensland. A few years later, I did a heap of door knocking and landed some great access. I managed to take a lot of friends to enjoy this part of the world and learn about these very switched-on, flighty deer.

MOST of my experience is based on the northern Queensland herd. I find they behave differently depending on where you hunt them.

Chital or axis deer (with the scientific name *Axis axis*) were the first deer species introduced to Australia, imported from Sri Lanka and India in the early 1800s. They were first brought in by Dr John Harris, a surgeon in the NSW Corps who had a plan to start the deer meat industry in Australia. He started with around 400 chital, which later inspired others to introduce them to different parts of Australia.

They were distributed in Victoria, NSW and Queensland but the

stronghold developed along the Burdekin River and the Basalt Wall. They hold little value to farmers in these areas these days and with government agencies throwing grants around the numbers have dwindled dramatically.

Physical characteristics

Chitals' good looks are because their hides consist of a red/brown coat, a dark black dorsal stripe, white spots and a white throat patch. They have a longer tail than most deer, and it sticks straight up like a whitetail deer when they are alert or waving goodbye as they bounce off. Their muzzle is a dark brown colour;

SPECIES GUIDE: CHITAL DEER

it's darker again in the mature stags. Their pointy ears work very well.

Chital antlers in most cases will be six-point total and very light in weight. However, in good feed areas they can carry some good weight and length. Chital antlers measuring 30 inches and above are considered an exceptional trophy.

A mature stag will weigh around 70-80kg and hinds can range from 50 to 60kg. Most stags stand around 900-1000mm high at the shoulder and hinds somewhat less at around 800mm on average.

When alarmed, chital will make a high-pitched squeal that is similar to a hog deer's. During mating season a male will make a long drawn-out call to entice females to join his harem.

Habitat and distribution

I have been lucky to hunt chital in all different kinds of country. Hunting them along the coast in NSW, they generally live in jungle-type country with thick lantana. Here they seem to only really feed out into the open paddocks closer to dark, or you may catch them out early in the morning.

Most of my experience is in basalt country in northern Queensland. There, the chital live in very dry, rocky country, however it is undulating country and the deer can get in elevated places to look out for danger. In good seasons the grass can grow



1

taller than a metre, giving the deer good cover to make their way around undetected.

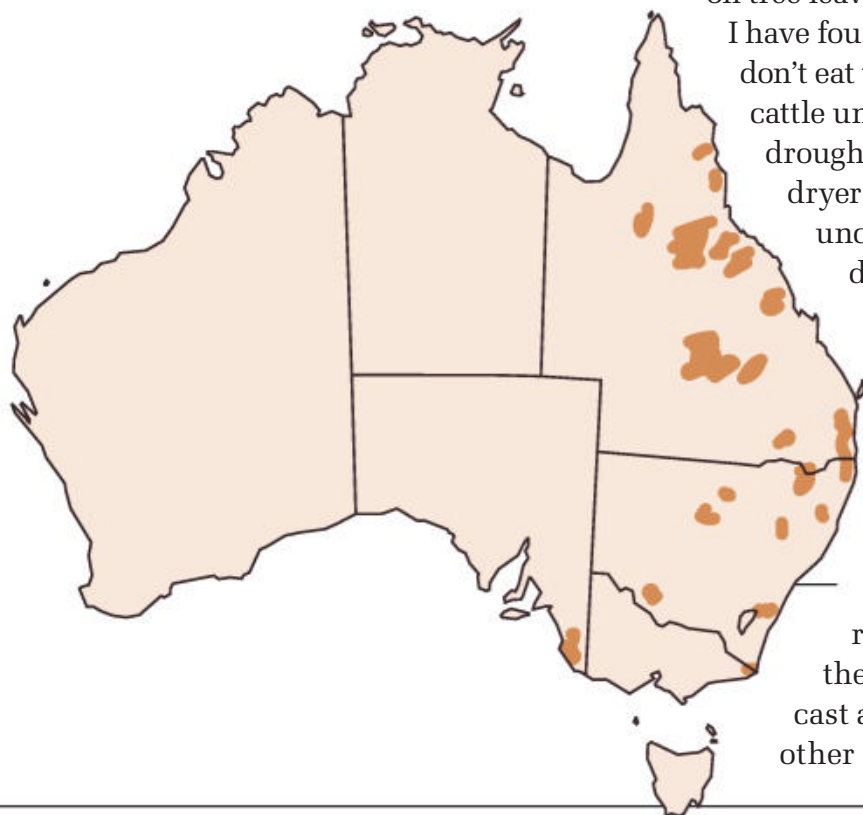
With temperatures reaching mid- to high-40s in this area, one thing for sure is deer won't be far from a good, clean water source, narrowing down the numbers of locations you'll need to look.

Chital prefer to hang out around the station or houses, specially those with dogs. It's an instinct these deer have learnt because they are prey to dingoes. In our landscape, they use the house and domestic dogs to keep the dingoes at bay.

Chital will generally browse on tree leaves, fruit and grass.

I have found they generally don't eat the same feed as cattle unless in really bad drought conditions. In dryer years, it's not uncommon to see the deer licking up molasses with cattle on their stations.

Like other species, if they can't get the required vitamins from regular feed, they will chew on cast antlers left by other deer.



ON THIS SPREAD

1 Chital are unmistakable with their vivid spots and well-defined colours

2 Always alert for danger, chital are among the most skittish of the deer species, which is saying something!

3 Chital in southern areas tend to stay in thick, jungle-like bush where they are very hard to find.

4 Wild dogs and dingoes prey on chital, which affects behaviour and habits.

Chital sign

Chital sign is hard to miss, especially that of a stag. They aggressively rub trees, getting their antlers razor sharp, more often than not breaking off tips in the process. You will find gumtrees ripped apart up to two metres in height.

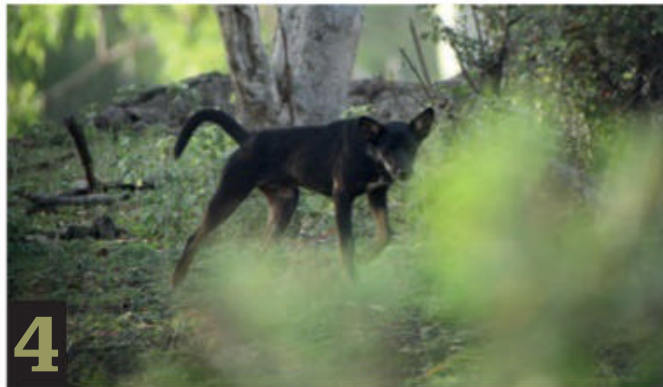
In basalt country, it can be hard to find chital sign due to the rocky, sandy ground but you will find prints around watering holes.

Season

Chital are not subject to a set hunting season. You will find them in any stage of antler growth throughout the year. However, they do have times of year that seem to be more favourable than others.

January can be a great time to hunt chital, especially in northern Queensland with a lot of hinds cycling and stags roaming to find their next partner. However, the temperature is generally around 40 degrees and humidity levels are high, making the hunting hard going for southerners who aren't used to it.

I have had great success in August in Queensland, when I have found hinds cycling with nice stags around and the weather is much more pleasant. Quite often there is a dew of a morning, and it can be a little bit chilly.



“

Chital stags like to roam, so you never know what will turn up.”

Hunting methods

You can stalk riverbanks, springs and low depressions, where you may find deer moving to water or back to bedding areas.

Spotting and stalking is a good tactic. Find a high spot that gives you a good vantage point to look around, then try to find the deer you'll stalk in on for a shot.

Tools of the trade

It really depends on your hunting location but the minimum rifle calibre for chital in Victoria is .243 (6.17mm), and that's a fair call for everywhere else. Victoria states the minimum draw weight using a bow is 45 pounds and the arrow must be fitted with a broadhead having a combined weight of 350 grains.

Binoculars are a must. I like to use 10-power, paired with a spotting scope, although the high

magnification of spotting scopes means they are only good early morning and late afternoon in northern Queensland, with heat haze really affecting the clarity.

Hunting advice

Hunting chital is very addictive. In my opinion it's completely different to any other deer we have here and can be an enjoyable adventure.

Chital stags like to roam and often can walk massive distances to find hinds, so you never know what will turn up. Often, in the last days of a week-long hunt, I've had a stag turn up that I hadn't seen the whole time. You will also come across them well away from any other deer or houses.

In saying that, if you see a trophy stag you would like to take, be quick to make your decision. Chital don't take well to pressure and if they

catch you in their domain, they will soon become nocturnal or take off to never be seen again. After hunting a property for a few days, you will see the deer numbers thin out very quickly and the remaining animals will be a lot more on edge.

Chital stags suffer ground shrinkage more than any other. With its small, slender body a stag in the low 20-inch range can look very impressive on the hoof. When I am trying to gauge the length of a stag, I like to see at least a few inches of antler over their back line when their head is down feeding. Judging the antler can be tricky. In most cases they will be around 17 inches to the fork of the inner tine. This can change depending on the antler from time to time but it's a very handy thing to know in most cases.

Get out there, get the bug and enjoy hunting the beautiful spotted deer. 🎯



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Sightron SII HD spotting scope

Whether you're in the field or at the range, Sightron's SII HD Blue Sky spotting scope offers excellent clarity with features like ED (extra-low dispersion) glass, fully multi-coated lenses and nitrogen charging to prevent fogging, while also being water and shock proof. The SII HD Blue Sky spotting scope is available in 16-48x68 with angled eye piece or 20-60x85 with either angled or straight eye piece.

These scopes also offer a quick-focus wheel conveniently located on the top centre; twist-out eye cup for the correct eye relief; and a 76mm sun shade on the front to protect the lens from glare and rain. Each Sightron spotting scope comes with a protective cordura field case.

To find out more about these spotting scopes or Sightron's full range of binoculars and riflescopes ask at your local gun shop or visit herrons.com.au.

Webley & Scott 900XS shotgun

This beautiful 12G competition over/under shotgun has an adjustable stock and high rib. Available in the choice of 30" or 32" barrels, it offers a 3" chamber and is steel shot proof. Other features include a silver action with competition engraving, fully adjustable comb, competition palm swell and hi-viz front sight.

The Webley & Scott 900XS Competition over/under is also supplied with five interchangeable, extended chokes. Its walnut stock has a satin finish. These well-priced shotguns are designed in the UK and come with Webley & Scott's five-year warranty.

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



New Ruger Precision Rifle

The first Ruger Precision Rifle was released in 2015 and was made to allow shooters to enter precision shooting matches with an out-of-the-box, affordable rifle that ticked all the boxes. Since then, Ruger has released a Gen 3 version, and now there's an enhanced Gen 3 version available in 6.5 Creedmoor with some added features.

This newest addition to the Ruger Custom Shop line of firearms features a factory-installed Trigger Tech trigger with what's called Frictionless Release Technology. It builds upon the already

competitive Precision Rifle to deliver a factory-built firearm specifically designed for long-range competition.

This model is finished predominantly in grey Cerakote around the hard black anodised receiver. In states that permit it, the rifle features a folding stock with adjustable length of pull and comb height. It has a cold hammer forged, 26" barrel with 5R rifling, a 1:7.5 twist, and it's threaded and fitted with an APA muzzle brake. Its weight is 5.8kg.

The list of features goes on, so for more information ask at your local gun shop or visit nioa.com.au.



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CRIMSON TRACE



Winchester gun safes

Winchester Australia recently released a new range of gun safes in a variety of sizes from a compact safe for pistols and valuables to a huge 25-gun safe. The compact pistol safe features a 6mm body and 6mm door and is 380mm wide, 300mm high and 300mm deep. Key operated with hidden hinges, it also offers a modern look and finish.

Winchester's Cat C eight-gun safe, constructed of 3mm body and 6mm door, is a well made safe that weighs 78.5kg and measures 360mm wide, 1500mm high and 360mm deep.

The 25-gun safe is a Cat A/B safe and features a 3mm body and 3mm door. Dimensions are 1000mm by 1500mm by 550mm. Two more Cat A/B safes hold eight and 12 guns respectively and are constructed of 2mm body and 3mm door.

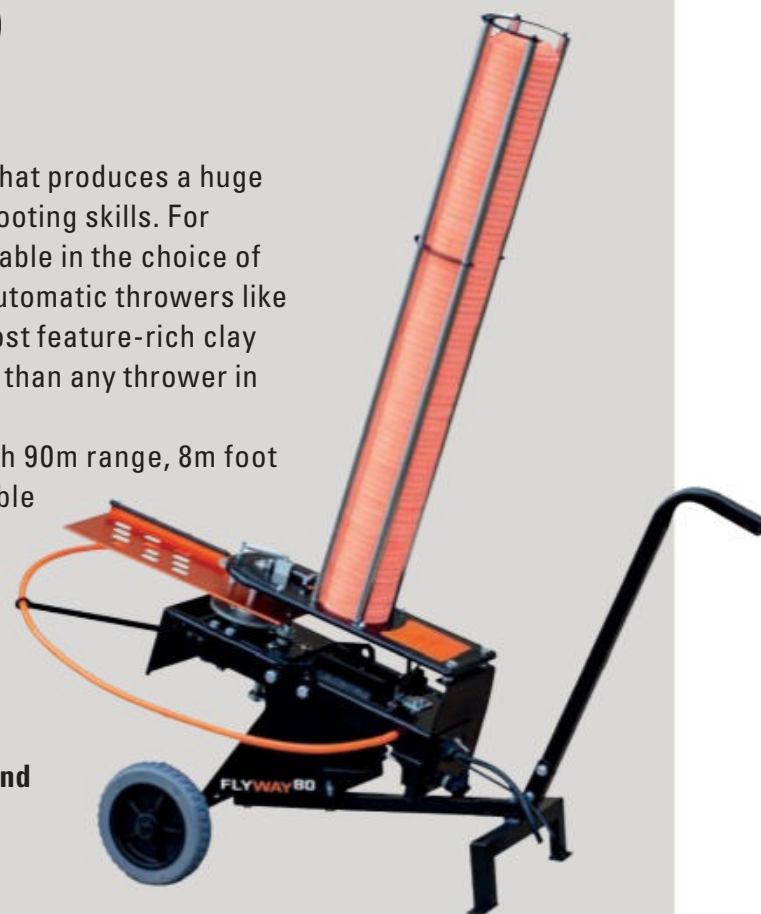
All the rifle safes offer a separate ammo locker and all are strong and reliable. Before purchasing a safe, however, check with local authorities to ensure you meet safe storage requirements in your state or territory. **To find out more ask at your local gun shop or visit the website, winchesteraustralia.com.au.**

Do All Flyway 80 Automatic Trap

Do All Outdoors is an American company that produces a huge range of targets and traps to hone your shooting skills. For example, its clay target throwers are available in the choice of manual models like the Clay Cannon and automatic throwers like the Flyway 80 Trap. This trap is Do All's most feature-rich clay pigeon thrower, offering you more options than any thrower in its class.

Features include a wireless remote with 90m range, 8m foot pedal release chord, 5-35 degree adjustable angles for different throwing planes, 2.5 second recycle time, 50m-plus clay throws and a capacity of up to 80 clays. This complete unit offers built-in wheels and a pull handle for easy carry and storage.

Ask to see the full range of Do All targets and clay throwers at your local gun shop or visit osaaustralia.com.au.



Marlin 1895 Guide Gun

Marlin has released its new 1895 Guide Gun in .45-70 Govt that is compact, easy handling and very reliable. Formally known as the 1895 GBL (Guide Big Loop), this lever-action was originally designed for guides in places like Alaska to deal with bears and other dangerous game.

The GBL is the latest release in the Marlin lineup since Ruger took on the brand. Minor design changes, along with a brand-new factory and tooling, give these new rifles a classier finish and higher quality than ever before.

Similar to the new stainless-steel 1895 SBL

and Trapper models, the Guide Gun features a big-loop lever and is the first steel-alloy, blued Marlin since the Ruger take-over.

Other features include a brown laminated stock, open sights with semi-buckhorn rear sight, six-plus-one magazine capacity, a 19" satin-blued barrel and a beautiful finish. It's a great rifle for big game and close-up hunting in the scrub.

There is lots more to come in the Marlin range under Ruger's direction, so keep an eye out for up-coming reports.

In the meantime, to find out more ask at your local gun shop or visit nioa.com.au.



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SSP safety eyewear

Specialized Safety Products (SSP) is a USA-based manufacturer of world-class safety eyewear. Its product range includes everyday sunglasses, eyewear for the job site and also a large selection of safety sunnies for sporting activities such as hunting, shooting and fishing.

Some of the product range is now available here in Australia through Hunt's Shooting Supplies with a bigger selection on the cards for the future. One is SSP's Methow Pro 6HD six-lens kit, specifically for shooters. Ideal for trap or sporting clays, the kit includes six HD lenses in a selection of shades — clear, dark orange, copper, dark purple, vermillion and medium light (ML) — that are constructed of an anti-scratch, shatter-proof material. Offering excellent clarity and enhanced

vision, these optically corrected lenses feature NVR/LENS fog technology via a hydrophilic coating. They are rated for safety and UV protection.

The frames are infrangible and won't distort, so you don't have to worry about them losing shape if you accidentally step on them. In fact, they're designed to flex because to change a lens you have to slightly bend the frame to remove and replace the lens with another shade.

The kit has two additional, adjustable nose pieces, a head strap to ensure your eyewear stays in place while worn and a hard case to store the entire kit in.

To find out more or see the full range of SSP protective eyewear visit huntsshootingsupplies.com.au.

Pecar Optics in Australia

Pecar Optics Australia is a new innovator in advanced sporting optics, presenting high quality and reliable rifle scopes at an affordable price. Backed by years of industry experience, these scopes are built for purpose, offering high-end components and technical features which ensure the perfect shot in any conditions.

There are three series in the range: White Carbon, Blue Carbon and Black Carbon. Nick Harvey reviewed one of the Black Carbon scopes last issue and was very impressed.

The White Carbon Series of variable-power rifle scopes is available in the choice of 2-7x32, 3-9x40 or 3-12x40mm. Of 1" tube construction, all feature a mil-dot reticle and are nitrogen purged, and water and fog proof. Other features include ¼ MOA click adjustment and multi-coated lenses for enhanced clarity. Recommended retail prices start from just \$199.

Next is the Pecar Blue Carbon series. They all have 30mm tubes and feature a glass etched reticle and multi-coated lenses for a crisp, clear sight picture. The Blue Carbon series is available in an 8x56mm fixed power with German 4P reticle, which is a cut above the rest. In addition, the Blue Carbon series features a 3-9x44mm and a 4-16x50mm with mil-dot reticles, both with an adjustable objective for parallax correction. They are suitable for use on air rifles. RRP starts from \$349.

The Black Carbon scopes are Pecar's premium ones. These scopes are all built with a 30mm tube diameter and feature multi-coated lenses with wide-angle technology. They also feature illuminated, glass etched reticles and provide a bright, sharp image even in low light conditions. Available in 1.5-6x42, 2.5-10x50 and 3-12x56, all have German #4 illuminated reticles and interchangeable target turrets. The series also has the 5-25x56 with a more detailed reticle in the first focal plane, ideal for long-range target shooting. RRP for the Black Carbon range starts from \$649.

Pecar Optics are committed to ensuring absolute satisfaction and confidence for any shooter, backed by a 10-year warranty on all optics. **To see these scopes or to find out more about the full range, ask at your local gun shop or visit protactical.com.au. Trade enquiries welcome.**



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The miser's magnum

Nick revisits the controversial .30-06 Ackley Improved, getting great results with new loads.



AMERICANS have had a long love affair with the .30 calibre, which has been the bullet diameter by which all other cartridges are judged. From velocity and trajectory to terminal performance and recoil, any new .30 always raises the question: “How does it compare to the .30-06?”

The .30-06 is a quiet achiever, an old warhorse that is 107 years old. As a mark of its excellence, nearly every manufacturer of centrefire rifles still lists it in the calibre line-up.

One of the most controversial wildcats ever developed was PO Ackley's .30-06 Improved back in the 1940s and '50s. Two schools of thought clashed heatedly over the cartridge; one group claimed it was little better than the standard .30-06 while another school argued that it was as good as the .300 H&H magnum, at that time the sole popular commercial .30-cal magnum. One writer, tongue in cheek, even christened it “the miser's magnum”.

After reading various articles about the .30-06 Ackley back in the 1950s, in 1980 I set out to separate fact

from fiction. It appeared there were several issues which fuelled controversy over the wildcat's performance. One was the lack of handloaders' chronographs, which led to experimenters guesstimating the velocities they were getting. Another was that many were using the wrong powders, but there wasn't a wide choice of suitable slow-burning propellants back in the early days.

I had my .30-06 Mauser rifle re-chambered to the Ackley Improved version, which is fire-formed to give a 0.535” (13.59mm) diameter at the start of a sharp 40-degree shoulder angle and 0.419” (10.64mm) neck. The rifle was a mongrel built on a military Brno VZ 24 Mauser action fitted with a 25½-inch Böhler barrel.

I christened it Orphan Annie and started loading the slowest powders available at that time — H4831, IMR 4350, Winchester 785 and, much later in 1992, IMR 7828 and Reloder 22. The conclusion I reached was that the .30-06 Ackley was a well-balanced and very efficient wildcat and that its volume was probably better suited to the .30 bore



I was not surprised to find that the best accuracy came with maximum or near maximum loads.”

size than the .30-calibre belted magnums of the day.

The results I obtained brought to mind Rocky Gibbs' statement about his .30 Gibbs. He said there was a plentiful supply of .30-06 brass and that a case with standard head size delivers 40 percent less thrust to the locking lugs than a case with a magnum head size.

According to the five pages of data in my log, the velocities I got with my original .30-06 Ackley were impressive. They topped out at 3210fps with the 150gn bullet; 3066fps with the 165gn; 2950fps with the

The .30-06 Ackley Improved cartridge with bullets for small to big game. L to R: Woodleigh 130gn PPSN, Speer 150gn spitzer, Barnes 150gn TSX, Nosler 168gn Solid Base, Norma 180gn HPBT, and 200gn Lapue Mega and Sierra 200gn SBT.

180gn; and 2850fps with the 200gn. How accurate were these figures? Back then I was relying on a chronograph with a binary read-out that I am dubious about today. This only increased my desire to verify those results.

This time my rifle was based on a new stainless Winchester Model 70 action, a stainless Pac-Nor barrel with Model 70 Featherweight profile and a Model 70 Extreme Weather synthetic stock. The chamber had a throat length that allowed me to seat 180gn bullets slightly above the base of the neck. This throating allowed a cartridge length of 3.315” (84.2mm), the maximum overall cartridge length which will fit in the magazine of the Model 70.

I had two pillars inserted in the stock, and the recoil lug and first two inches of the barrel were bedded in epoxy, leaving the rest of the barrel floating. The lightweight barrel has a 1:10” twist and a length of 25 inches which provided a light hunting rifle, one that carries easily and packs a considerable punch for all deer species including sambar.

Cases for the .30-06 Ackley are easy to form simply by firing factory ammo in the improved chamber, or by loading virgin brass with a charge 2gn less than the listed maximum load for the standard .30-06. The best results are gained using a snappy load so that when the rifle is fired, body taper is greatly reduced, and the shoulder fills out to form sharp edges accompanied by increased powder capacity.

The load I used for fire-forming Sellier & Bellot .30-06 cases was 55gn of AR2209



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behind the 180gn Sierra boat-tail seated to an overall cartridge length of 3.315" (84.2mm). This length only just fitted into the Model 70's magazine. Forty cases were fire-formed without losing a single one.

Headspace of rimless cartridges is generally measured from the face of a locked bolt to some point on the shoulder called the datum line, and industry standards set allowable headspace at .004" (0.1mm) maximum, but headspace in an improved cartridge must be considerably less than what is normally regarded as minimum.

When cartridges are inserted in chambers having relatively the same shoulder angle they are bound to make contact at some point on the shoulder, but this is not possible when a factory cartridge enters an improved chamber because it will be fired in a chamber radically different from the standard chamber, which is a close fit to the cartridge itself. The only point of contact in the improved chamber is going to be exactly at the junction of neck and shoulder, which calls for practically nil headspace.

In the standard .30-06 the bolt should close on a 1.940 go-gauge but refuse to close on the 1.946 no-go gauge to ensure headspace is within the allowable limits (.004-.006", or .1-.15mm). With the Improved cartridge the 1.940 gauge becomes to the no-go

gauge, and the go-gauge must be approximately .004" shorter, or 1.936. Ideally, when fire forming a standard .30-06 cartridge to .30-06 Ackley, the bolt should close with a slight 'feel'.

Today, ballisticians are convinced that the sharp 40-degree shoulder that Ackley favoured creates greater resistance to the burning powder by holding more of it back in the case during the burning process. Reducing the amount of unburned granules being blown out into the chamber throat decreases erosion. A straight-bodied case with minimum body taper combined with a sharp shoulder also slows the forward flow of brass, reducing the number of times cases will need trimming.

Maximum loads were developed using Sellier & Bellot cases from the same lot. Powder charges were increased one grain at a time. When excessive pressures were encountered, the charge was reduced by one grain and five shots were fired.

The pressure ring on each one of the fired cases was measured and the readings averaged. That reading was then considered the maximum reading for all the rounds fired. The loads I've listed in the table are working loads and below maximum, but for other rifles start at least three



The Model 70 fitted with 25-inch stainless-steel Pac-Nor barrel, contoured for the Model 70 Featherweight, is slim, trim and fast handling.

grains below and work up one grain at a time.

The secret to safe handloads is good case life and snug primer pockets. In no instance was it hard to extract a case and I could literally lift the bolt handle with one finger.

A couple of tips: when working with maximum handloads, the sizing die should be set so the case fits the chamber with absolute minimum clearance. If the sizing die is set properly, the case head will not slam against the bolt face and register erroneous pressure indications, nor will case head separations become a problem.

In addition, be sure that all sizing lubricant is removed from the cartridge cases. Any oil or residue on the case prevents the case from gripping the chamber wall. A slippery condition within the chamber will increase bolt thrust considerably, and high bolt thrust can be dangerous, particularly when working with high pressure loads.

My tests were carried out under conditions that were as controlled as most handloaders can obtain. I fired from sandbags on a bench over a Chrony chronograph, measuring the

velocity and shooting for accuracy at the same time.

As I worked up loads gradually, I was not surprised to find that the best accuracy came with maximum or near maximum loads for each combination of powder and bullet. The light Pac-Nor barrel gave good hunting accuracy with every weight of bullet I tried, which I attributed to the neat chambering job and a ratio of powder capacity to bore capacity that's not too high. In my experience, however, few .30-calibre rifles are all that finicky in the first place.

The best powders in the .30-06 Improved were a pair of slow burners: AR2209 and AR2213SC. AR2217 proved too slow and I couldn't get enough in the case. In my original rifle, I gained some excellent velocities with W785 ball powder. Alas, Winchester's excellent ball powders are no longer available.

Velocities from the .30-06 Improved using these slower-burning powders were well ahead of what I obtained in a maximum-loaded .30-06.

Reading pressures by measuring case head expansion, I got my highest



The .30-06 Ackley has an edge over the .30-06 and .308 Win. It comes close to the Remington .300 SAUM, but is outperformed by the 30 Nosler and .300 Weatherby Magnum.

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velocity in a standard .30-06 with 24" barrel: 3015fps with the Woodleigh 150gn bullet, 60gn of AR2209 and the CCI 250 primer in a Super-X case. And I got 2799fps with Barnes 168gn ELD-X and 58gn of AR2209; and 2750fps with the 180gn Woodleigh and 47gn of AR2209. All three were maximum loads.

The 25" .30-06 Ackley Improved churns up 3210fps with the Barnes 150gn TSX, 63gn of AR2209 and CCI 250 primer in fire-formed Sellier & Bellot cases. That's 195fps faster than the standard .30-06 does at its best.

The tightest groups, however, were obtained with 62gn of AR2209 with the 150gn Barnes TSX, which delivered 3164fps with groups averaging .890. That's still almost 150fps faster than the standard .30-06.

My main interest in the Improved .30-06 focused on the Nosler 168gn Bonded Solid Base bullet for general deer hunting. With polymer tip, tapered copper alloy jacket and boat-tail base, the 168gn bullet shoots flat and carries increased striking energy away out yonder.

In the .30-06 AI my maximum load reached 3064fps with the 168gn Nosler BSB and 61gn of AR2209. That gives the old timer a major

boost, and other powders can't match it in the standard case. A maximum load of 57gn of AR2209 in the standard .30-06 barely turned up 2843fps.

In my original .30-06 Improved it was possible to drive a 165gn bullet to over 3100fps from a 24" barrel without excessive pressures — and with good accuracy. In the Model 70 the 165gn AccuBond clocked 3175fps, hard-driven by 62gn of AR2209, and it shot nice, round sub-MOA groups.

As testing progressed it became apparent that the sharp-shouldered, straight-walled Improved case is capable of significantly higher velocities and becomes more efficient with bullets weighing 165gn or more, without excessive pressures.

Evidently, the sharp shoulder of the case causes more complete burning of the powder, whereas lighter bullets can be urged down the barrel before the powder is completely combusted.

For instance, the Improved drives the 180gn Norma bullet at 2945fps with a maximum charge of 64gn of AR2213sc. This was yet another accurate load, too.

Experienced hunters who swear by the .300 Winchester Magnum should take notice.

These are spectacular velocities for 168 and 180gn bullets, which are the most useful weights. A strongly structured 165-168gn projectile is, in my estimation, just as effective as the 180gn. It starts out 100fps faster than the 180gn, but there is little difference in drop at 400yd and it delivers pretty much the same amount of energy as the 180gn depending on the shape of the bullet used.

The .30-06 Ackley Improved is capable of driving 200gn bullets at 2800fps with excellent accuracy. AR2213sc is the top powder choice; 63gn drives the Lapua 200gn Mega at 2802fps. This just might be the most ideal bullet weight for all-round shooting of tough big-game animals in heavy cover.

The 180gn spitzer with a muzzle velocity of 3000fps will have almost the same impact point at 200yd as the 200gn at 2800fps. However, the 200gn reaches 200yd packing about 200ft-lb more energy than the 180gn and has more penetration and bone-smashing ability.

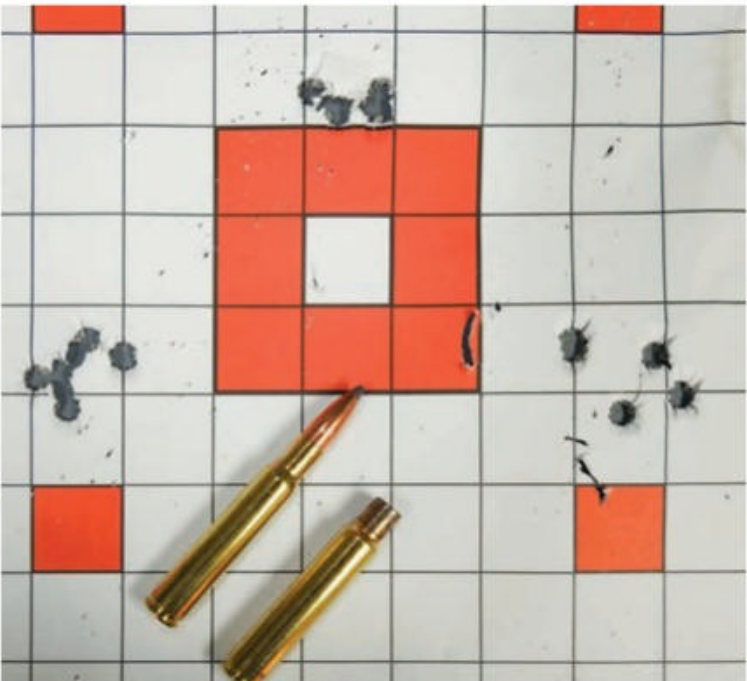
How does the .30-06 AI stack up against the .300 Win Mag? It comes close while using a lot less powder. The belted case needs 78gn of powder to give the 165gn bullet 3250fps; 75gn to give the

180gn 3100fps, and the 200gn 2950fps. In general then, the Improved trails the .300 Win Mag by about 100-150fps, but the magnum needs 10-20gn more powder and a 26-inch barrel to hold its advantage.

Observe the usual precautions when handloading this wildcat: differences in the case capacities of different makes of brass can affect maximum loads. I used Sellier & Bellot brass which is normally slightly heavier and holds a bit less powder than some other brands, but the difference is not carved in stone, so be sure to check case volume if you change brands.

After fire-forming in the Improved chamber, the S&B case holds four more grains of powder than standard S&B .30-06 brass. So don't interchange brass without dropping back three grains and working up again. Using slow-burning powders, the safest loads are high-density ones which leave little or no air space in the case.

The .30-06 Ackley Improved is well named "the miser's magnum". If anything, it is a highly efficient cartridge which rivals the acclaimed short magnums in an outfit that won't give you fallen arches carrying it o'er hill and dale. ☛



Fire-forming cases for the Improved version resulted in a number of sub-MOA five-shot groups, indicating a good rifle.

LOADS FOR THE .30-06 ACKLEY IMPROVED					
Bullet (gn)	Powder type	Charge (gn)	Velocity (fps)	Energy (ft-lb)	Accuracy (inches)
Woodleigh 130	AR2208	57	3327	3195	.875
Speer 150 spitzer	AR2209	62	3165	3337	.952
Barnes 150 TSX	AR2209	63	3210	3432	.890
AccuBond 165	AR2209	62	3175	3694	.795
Nosler 168 SB	AR2209	62	3115	3620	.922
Norma 180 SBT	AR2213sc	65	3045	3459	1.000
Norma 180 SBT	AR2209	63	3062	3748	.980
Norma 180 SBT	AR2213sc	65	2920	3408	.852
Lapua 200 Mega	AR2213sc	62	2799	3480	.922
Lapua 200 Mega	AR2217	65	2720	3286	.926

Notes: test rifle Model 70 Winchester with 25" Pac-Nor barrel, 10" twist. Velocity measured with Chrony chronograph. Accuracy taken as the average of four 5-shot groups. All loads grouped within one inch.

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“All I wanted to do was continue chasing pigs and goats across the flats.”

LEFT: Memories are made of this: snaps from Chloe’s hunting trip out west.

Way out west

It’s hot, dusty and a long, long way away but Chloe knows her favourite hunting grounds.

AFTER a nine-hour drive with Dad and his two hunting mates, Brad and Gav, we arrived in Bourke. This was my first trip out west and I was stoked!

However, everyone’s advice that it was going to be hot did no justice to how hot it really was. I was not prepared for this. The 41-degree days were not what I was used to.

This was a few years ago and the severe lack of green grass was a real eye opener to how bad the drought really was at that time.

After settling in to the shearers’ quarters we sat around the kitchen table studying the property map so we could get a fair idea of the layout of the place. Luckily for

us, Brad had been going to this property for years and knew all of the good spots.

That afternoon we all set out in Dad’s trusty old Navara to one of the many dams in search of goats.

Stopping a good kilometre away, we decided to go the rest on foot so we wouldn’t spook any goats that may be there. With the dam in sight it was clear we had chosen well. There were hundreds of them!

The billies, nannies and kids were all oblivious to the four new arrivals decked out in camo. As Brad and Gav hung back, Dad and I slowly made our way closer to a good

rest. Looking around the mob, I found a decent sized nanny and pointed her out to dad.

With him nodding in agreement, I slowly closed the bolt on my rifle and squeezed the trigger. Moments later the nanny lay dead. I had shot my first goat.

Due to the heat, we focused on chasing goats of an early morning and late afternoon, then spotlighting the pigs feeding on the crops of a night.

On the second day of the trip I encountered my first mob of feral pigs. It’d be an understatement to say I was shocked they I saw they weren’t bright pink like the pigs in a petting zoo!

Unlike the ‘old’ men, I had trouble sleeping and relaxing because of the excitement every day. All I wanted to do was continue chasing pigs and goats across the flats.

It’s true when they say the west is the best. 🇺🇸

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WINNER



Glenn Hando reports that these monsters came from a mate's property. They'd been eating out of the sheep feeders and growing big and fat! They must have got through a fair bit of feed, by the look of it. A few rounds from a .270 have saved the farmer a lot of money.



Steven Bothe was spotlighting foxes out along the Darling River, giving his brand new Lithgow .223 its first outing, when this young boar got in the way. The Lithgow proved its worth and the pig never lived to regret it.

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