

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S SHOOTER



Olympian
**Pattie
Dench**
**an inspiration
to all shooters**



Contents

- 2 Editorial
- 3 Loved the first issue - letter
- 3 Taking aim with Laetisha Scanlan
- 3 Women's-only competition
- 4 Pattie Dench an inspiration to all shooters
- 7 Beretta 691 Vittoria Sporting
- 9 Ladies Day welcomed at SSAA Bundaberg
- 10 All about the fit
- 13 Trophy with a twist



Editorial



Gemma Dunn

Thank you to all who read our inaugural edition and we appreciate the feedback provided. It's great to hear that so many of you understand AWS is all about unity within the shooting community. There is strength in numbers and we encourage and accommodate the continued collective growth in sports shooting and hunting.

Current Australian shooting champion Laetisha Scanlan kicks off her regular column in this edition. Our feature story highlights where it all began as we profile the amazing Patricia 'Pattie' Dench who, in 1984 in Los Angeles, was the first Australian woman to win a shooting medal at an Olympic Games. The new Beretta 691 Vittoria Sporting has hit Australian shores and our hands-on review showcases Beretta's first shotgun series designed for women. My practical piece takes an in-depth look at the importance of your firearm having the right fit. We feature a family hunting story where a mother lands her first trophy animal and more. We also take a glimpse at the outstanding fun and success had at the SSAA Bundaberg Ladies Day.

Visit ssaa.org.au to view our wide range of material and extensive membership benefits as Australia's largest and leading impartial sports shooting body. Your continued feedback and suggestions are welcome to aws@ssaa.org.au

Gemma

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S SHOOTER

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Loved the first issue

I write to congratulate the SSAA on the inaugural *Australian Women's Shooter*. After receiving it from my husband (yes he read it first, commenting on how interesting the articles were), I read it all with great interest.

The Weatherby Camilla sounds like a nice fit for me, an improvement on my current scrub rifle and something I could pull out and be proud of. I'll definitely check one out next time I'm in the big smoke.

And the ocular dominance article struck a chord, especially when I was out with my mother-in-law for a bit of fun cracking a few clays. She's right-handed and was trying to use her left eye as she could not see 'properly' with her right. After some coaching from my husband we had her shooting left-handed and shooting up a storm. She had so much fun that at 70 she's even considering joining a club. Already looking forward to the next issue.

Mary Hume, via email

Thanks Mary. I'm pleased your family is behind the magazine. I look forward to hearing more from yourself and others at aws@ssaa.org.au

Gemma

Taking aim with Laetisha Scanlan



As a proud member of the Australian Clay Target Shooting team I have been fortunate enough to travel the world competing. In that time, I have learnt some important life lessons and been given opportunities that perhaps would have never been available to me otherwise.

After winning in the Commonwealth Games last year at the Gold Coast, I was lucky to have the chance to venture in to numerous schools and talk to students about my experiences as an athlete and what it means to represent Australia.

I've always known that children can be easily influenced and absorb information rapidly, so I found a duty of care to myself and them to be as honest as I could about the trials and tribulations of elite sport.

For example, I believe that winning a gold medal is not actually about the medal itself but more related to what it represents - years of hard work, highs and lows, sacrifices and commitment.

But what I couldn't believe was the huge cultural difference between city schools versus country schools and their engagement when they found out I was a Clay Target shooter.

Most of the city schools had no idea about Trap shooting or what it involved and were somewhat perplexed that it was actually a sport. The country kids however had been brought up around firearms through their parents and living on farms and were more actively interested because they could relate to the sport and engaged at a much higher rate with questions. It was fantastic to see some of the schools even feature a shooting program as a part of their sport curriculum.

The point I am making is that we as a shooting fraternity need to do more in promoting a positive message of firearms into the community and schools. The fear surrounding guns is real but with the correct environment and right teaching it doesn't have to be.

I have always been a big advocate for promoting women in target sports, but I do believe we can do more, especially with our younger generations. The key to making shooting a more acceptable sport in Australia is education. I am realistic enough to accept that shooting will never be a mainstream sport, but as a sports-driven nation that loves winners, we deserve a little more recognition for our great achievements over the years.

Women's-only competition

Only female SSAA members are eligible to enter. One entry per member. To enter, simply write your name, address and membership number on the back of an envelope and send it to:

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Competition closes March 31, 2019

Pattie Dench

an inspiration to all shooters

Rod Pascoe



Pattie with her medal alongside a portrait showing the pistol she used in the LA Games in 1984.

Patricia (Pattie) Dench was the first Australian woman to win an Olympic medal in shooting. The occasion was the country's breakthrough success in pistol shooting by a man or woman. Her medal at the Los Angeles Games in 1984 was also the first by an Australian in any shooting discipline since the Paris Olympics in 1900. What Pattie didn't know was that she was at the leading edge of a change to the country's shooting medal fortunes. In the Atlanta Olympics in 1996, Michael Diamond, SSAA member Russell Mark and Deserie Baynes (then Huddleston) helped put Australia fifth on the shooting medal table of 100 nations.

Dench posted a score of 583 out of 600 in the 25m Pistol match for women at the LA Games and, after a shoot-off with an 18-year-old, was awarded the bronze medal. At 52, Pattie was the oldest competitor at those Games. But age was no barrier to Pattie. In fact, she says that she didn't even think about it.

As Pattie discussed things with *Australian Women's Shooter*, her sensational result in Los Angeles is only part of the story. It's also about her preparation for the Games and how her determination and enthusiasm still plays a big part in her life 35 years on.

Pattie's shooting career started with a familiar story. "I met a guy who was a member of the Liverpool Pistol Club in south-western Sydney. I used to accompany him to the range when he shot and

I just sat in the car and read a book," said Pattie. "Then months later someone said: 'Why don't you come and have a shot?' I said that I couldn't shoot because I can't close my left eye to which they said: 'Don't worry, we'll have you shooting in no time.'"

The club provided a Browning .22 pistol and Pattie was instructed in the basics. She was told to look at the sights and not the target. "And I got all the shots on the target and most were in the black," she said. "That's when it all started – I was hooked." That was in October 1974, just 10 years before Pattie's Olympic debut. Pattie went on to shoot a number of Olympic disciplines including Free Pistol, Standard Pistol and Air Pistol, in which she also excelled.

"I got into the top of my game and I worked really hard. Shooting had been my life..."

- Pattie, Los Angeles Olympic Games bronze medal winner



It was the introduction of the 25m Pistol match specifically for women and juniors that gave Pattie the chance to shine. The 25m Pistol match is the same as the men's Centrefire match but using .22 rimfire guns and ammunition. 25m Pistol was previously known as Sport Pistol but Pattie prefers to call it by its 1970s name. "Ladies Match was my favourite sport and it was the only match in the Olympics just for women," she said. The match is shot over two stages of 30 shots each. The first is the precision stage where five shots are fired at the standard 25m target in five minutes. This is repeated six times. The second stage was referred to as dueling and comprises 30 shots using a Rapid Fire target, one shot fired at each three-second exposure of the turning target.

"A club member, John Davidson, took me under his wing and told me they were going to have Ladies Match at the Olympics in 1984 in Los Angeles. This then became my goal; to shoot in the Olympics," said Pattie.

"When I first started pistol shooting I was in B-grade in my first handicap event. John had become my coach by then and he said we should go to Tasmania and shoot in the Nationals to get some competition experience. So I trained as often as I could leading up to the match. Then at the Nationals, I came 10th overall and shot into A-grade. So I did what I wanted to do and, within a few months, I was in Master-grade.

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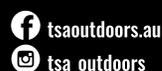
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From left: Ruby Fox, of the USA, the silver medallist at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, Linda Thom, Canada, gold medallist, and Pattie Dench, bronze.



Pattie's Hammerli 208 pistol is now in a private collection. The sticker from the gun check in Los Angeles is barely readable.

The cherished medal.

"I don't know whether John was a trained coach or not but he'd been shooting all his life and was very experienced. Shooting was his whole life and I fell into that pattern too. He picked up on my natural talent – that I didn't know I had," said Pattie.

"In 1976, I came second in the Nationals in Adelaide and was noticed by the selectors. This was my first opportunity for international experience and in 1978 I went to my first world championships in Korea."

In 1980 Pattie bought a brand new Hammerli 208 .22 pistol. Up to then she had been using secondhand guns. "I took it to Blacktown Pistol Club and shot the 30-shot dueling stage of the match. I shot a 299 out of 300 the first time I picked up the gun, beautiful trigger on it; just gorgeous," said Pattie.

Between 1978 and 1988 Pattie made many trips overseas to compete in world championships and she has plenty to show for it including in her other favourite event, Air Pistol. "I went to Korea twice, first in 1978 then went back in '79. Then 1979 in Suhl in what was East Germany before the wall came down, I came second in the world in Air Pistol. I shot Air Weapons championships, as it was called then, in the Dominican Republic in 1981, then the World Championships in 1982 in Caracas, 1983 in Innsbruck and 1984 Venezuela. In Munich, I came second to Russia in 1985.

"When I was training to go to the Olympics, I bought myself a little tape recorder and said to John, my coach, I

wanted to record his voice so when I'm over there in LA I could play his voice so it felt like I had someone there with me. I recorded his voice one day when I was shooting at Liverpool. He stood beside me and was saying things like 'breathe in, breathe out' and going through the routine with me. I wasn't allowed to play the tape while I was shooting but I played it whenever I was preparing to shoot – it was great to have it there."

Pattie's rise to shooting fame was, as she puts it, down to lots of hard work. "There was a psychological trainer for the American team in LA who put some ideas into our heads to motivate us. But I just got up and shot, that's all I did. The last thing I used to think about before I went to bed was the sight picture, every night, seeing my sights on the target," she said.

"I must have had blinkers on because nothing was more important than shooting at the time. I sacrificed many things. I didn't have a social life or go to the movies. I didn't go anywhere - I went to work.

The only time I went anywhere was to go shooting. I had good eyes and I was always a very fit person because I'd worked hard all my life. I got strong arms from carrying two sets of twins around. I went to the gym two or three times a week for three months before the Olympics and went to the chiropractor to keep my elbow strong and walked 15km a week and went to work. By the time I went to the Olympics I was 63 kilos and jumping out of my skin - I was so fit," she exclaimed.

As a younger woman, Pattie did have a sport – golf. An injury unfortunately meant that she could not progress to the level she was heading towards. Pattie is competitive and has an energy and determination still evident at 87 years. Not much has changed in Pattie's mindset, personality and attitude to life. When she returned from Los Angeles, Pattie had to consider: What do I do now?

"I got into the top of my game and I worked really hard. Shooting had been my life but I didn't need to do anything else in shooting and I wanted to leave the sport on a high. I think the last time I shot was at a club shoot in 1988. Then I started to see electric buggies on a golf course and thought I would take up golf again competitively," said Pattie. "I still wanted to compete. I still compete now, I compete at Bridge and I put my embroidery in shows, I still want to compete. That's what I do even now. I enjoy being busy. You've got to achieve something every day in your life, that's my policy.

"I joined the local Probus club and I've been asked to talk about the Olympics. I show my medals and my targets. Normally people talk for five minutes about their life but I take 40 minutes. They love it. It gave a lot of people a real thrill.

"I still watch all the televised shooting events - rifle, pistol and shotgun. I'm proud of all the women involved in sport, especially the shooters. I just wish I were young again so I could take up something new."



Beretta 691 Vittoria Sporting

The 2.5+ wood grade, fine chequering and sporting floral engraving with blackened finishes ensures that the Vittoria not only performs well, but looks good while doing so.



Gemma Dunn

In January I had the pleasure of reviewing the newest female-oriented shotgun on the market: Beretta's 690 Vittoria series. We are in exciting times when one of the largest firearms manufacturers in the world recognises that women are the biggest growing sector of our sport by creating specialised guns for 'off the shelf' purchase. Having more women in the sport means more families and more shooters collectively, so it's a win-win situation overall.

Shooting with friends is always better, so to join me I invited Amy Buys, a left-handed Sporting Clays shooter with 16 years' experience and Zuzana Navara, a right-handed Olympic Trap and Sporting Clays shooter with 12 years' experience. I decided that having a small group of women who are all different builds, who specialise in varying clay target disciplines, varying handedness and all shooting different brands of shotguns would provide

a good rounded review of this new series from Beretta.

In the Vittoria series, there are four different combinations of shotguns available: 691 Vittoria Field and Sporting plus the 693 Vittoria Field and Sporting. I was sent the 691 Sporting for this review.

Love at first sight

We all agreed that the look of the Vittoria is certainly one to catch your eye. It is a beautiful shotgun. The wood grade and particularly the sporting floral engraving was a constant talking point among not only us women, but the men we were shooting alongside too. The combination of silver against black through the design of the gun's fittings was quite unusual for this level of shotgun and we thought it offered a nice touch and point of difference for the Vittoria.

There is just something about shooting a nice-looking firearm. You want to be proud of what you use, in competition or out in the field, and the Vittoria has a certain style about it that made us all fall in love with the shotgun at first sight.

How is it different from a standard 691?

The main differences of the Vittoria are in the woodwork, with a reduced length of pull (LOP), differing cast and pitch, slimmer pistol grip and fore-end and drop with the semi-Monte Carlo. The Vittoria's stock and fore-end are designed to better fit the upper body frame, hand size and facial features of a woman over a standard 691 would (as they are more commonly designed to conform to the build of the average male). There is currently no option to reduce the barrel weight from the standard 691 and trust me, you wouldn't want to anyway.

Trying it on for size

Since the specifications of the Vittoria differ slightly to better suit the female frame, it is safe to say we all felt good when shooting this gun. It's not often that a lady will pick a firearm up and have it fit them well. Zuzana and I are quite tall (5'11" and 5'9" respectively) for your average Australian woman whereas Amy falls within average height, therefore the gun seemed to fit Amy the best overall. The biggest improvement from a standard Sporter for all of us was the semi-Monte Carlo stock. Many women naturally have higher cheekbones than men, and therefore most 'off the shelf' firearms are too low to use. The semi-Monte Carlo stock allowed us to see nicely down the barrel and on to the target with ease.

Zuzana and I felt as though the pistol grip and the fore-end were too small for our hands and found it difficult to place the correct positioning of our finger on the trigger. However, Amy did not find the size an issue and loved how it felt in her hands. We were all still able to shoot the gun well, despite these differences, and it certainly felt more comfortable shooting from both



Even as a left-hander shooting a right-handed gun, Amy Buys had no problems smashing the clay targets.

mounted and off the shoulder positions in comparison to the standard length and size of a 691 stock.

The excellent balance and feel when swinging the gun to a target is something that only fine shotgun makers are able to create and the Vittoria certainly doesn't disappoint. A lot of female shooters coming through can struggle with the weight of a standard shotgun. Through the use of features such as ventilated side ribs and the microcore recoil pad, the Vittoria

offers a perfect balance between allowing enough weight to assist with recoil and swing, and having it light enough to enjoy shooting for a longer period.

'La finale'

With the 690 Vittoria series for women, Beretta continues to highlight that owning a firearm that is balanced perfectly, easy to shoulder, fits you well and 'feels' comfortable to shoot, is a firearm you will succeed with for many years.

The interesting thing we found is that this gun might not only be well suited for women, even though it has the characteristics of something a female would be looking for in a firearm, we think that it could be a great one for juniors and some men also - making it a great gun to share.

With an RRP of \$4550 there is a lot of value in this shotgun; it could mean you won't have to spend extra hundreds, if not thousands of dollars at a stock maker's to shoot it comfortably. We all wish the Vittoria was around when we first started shooting and would have no hesitation in recommending it to any female shooters in the market for a new shotgun for sporting clays or field shooting.

It is important to have a model like this available so women shooters out there who



The semi-Monte Carlo offers good face positioning for Zuzana Navara's higher set cheekbones. The barrel selector and engraving exemplify the signature Beretta look.



are yet to experience shotgun shooting, can do so in a way that won't make them gun-shy. First experiences with a firearm are crucial and having models such as the Vittoria on offer will see a lot more females enjoy the shooting sports in Australia. Top Australian shooter and SSAA columnist Laetisha Scanlan agrees, saying "I am delighted to see that Beretta have taken the initiative to address the female market with the creation of the new Beretta Vittoria series. After having shot Beretta's for the past 14 years, it's great to see a gun targeted purely for the female shooter. I have always struggled to find an 'off the rack' gun to fit me for not only length but also grip. I believe this gun will be the answer to those worries, saving the need for ladies and juniors having to buy a custom-made stock."

The Beretta Vittoria 691 Sporter is available to purchase now. Visit berettaaustralia.com.au for more information.



The Vittoria comes packaged inside a case with a set of five chokes, stock tool, choke tool, gun lubricant and warranty/information booklets.

Specifications

Gauge 12ga

Receiver 691 Sporting Floral

Barrel lengths 28", 30", 32"

Barrel Optima-Bore HP, Optima-Choke HP, 10x8 top rib and ventilated side ribs.

Stock Reduced length of pull and pistol grip, semi-Monte Carlo with fine chequering and microcore 15mm recoil pad.

Drop At comb: 35mm. At face: 45mm. At heel: 55mm

Pitch Designed to fit the ergonomics of a female's chest.

Wood grade 2.5

Overall weight 3.35kg (unloaded)

Ladies Day welcomed at SSAA Bundaberg

Late last year SSAA Bundaberg held a Ladies Day to cater to the overwhelming interest the club had been receiving from local women curious about shooting. SSAA Bundaberg treasurer Luke Augutis championed the idea and soon had the rest of the branch members on board, as well as sponsors to make the day free of charge for the women.

"The committee members did a tremendous amount of planning, including an online booking link, targets, activities, range officers, catering, ammo as well as a variety of guns, plus much more," said Luke.

"Ultimately the hard work of the committee is what made this day not only a possibility but a hit for all who attended."

In total, 30 women and young ladies turned up for the event, with most being first-time shooters. The club also made a point of inviting media to the event, resulting in the attendance of Sarah Steger, a News Corp journalist. Sarah not only participated enthusiastically, she said it was hands down the most fun she had had in a long time.

"I think that the best part of the SSAA Ladies Day [was] just how enthusiastic and patient Luke and his wife Jacqui were with the some 30 women who attended," she said.

"Whether you were an experienced shooter or a woman who doesn't even know how to aim a netball let alone point and shoot a gun (me), you were welcome.

"It was awesome. The crowd was great, the camaraderie even better and the supportive, safe and friendly environment definitely helped combat the nerves."

Just like Sarah, the rest of the women also had a great time and the day was declared a success by all. The most popular discipline of the day was Metallic Silhouettes and almost all the women shot nearly all of the disciplines on offer. A special balloon target also proved to be a crowd favourite, demonstrating how much beginner shooters enjoy reactive targets.

Luke explained that the attendance was capped at 30 so that there were enough volunteers and range officers to cater to each shooter one-on-one.

Everyone managed to handle the kick of the shotguns.



One-on-one coaching was given to all attendees.



We always like to see plenty of brass being used.

"Holding a free open day is certainly a great way to spark interest in the sport, interest in your local club and to show the general public that they are welcome and can share your passion," said Luke.

"As I'm sure is the case with many other branches, our ultimate goal is to expand our membership and participation, and to share our great sport with the whole community so it is there for the next generation to enjoy."

Since attending the shoot, some of the women have made definite plans to become more involved with the club, going even as far as attending the SSAA Bundaberg Christmas party. As for future open days, Luke says the branch already has another one in the works due to the overwhelming response from this SSAA Ladies Day and greatly looks forward to helping more women join in the shooting sports.

All about the



Gemma Dunn

Some of you may know that since my first taste of shooting I have gone on to represent Australia at Junior and Senior World Cups and enjoy shooting many different disciplines of shotgun and rifle.

Having the correct gun fit was one of the most crucial elements to improving and enjoying my time on the range. My dad and I shared his first shotgun to compete with but, after speaking with a past Olympian on the range one day, we realised it wasn't going to work for long - he was much larger and stronger than I was and the gun didn't fit me at all.

Gun fit is important, the main reason being it allows you to be the best shooter you can be and it also enables you to do it comfortably and effortlessly. Many guns on the market don't suit the build of a woman off the shelf; meaning that we are guaranteed to have to spend extra hundreds, if not thousands of dollars, in having a stock maker fit it correctly. Stock makers are craftsmen who can alter all of the 'touch-points' on a gun to suit a shooter. Overall, there is no magical formula. We are all built differently, therefore our guns must all be built differently too.

Length of pull This is the distance from the trigger to the centre of a gun's butt/recoil pad (if a gun has two triggers, it is measured from the front trigger). Length of pull (LOP) will affect your gun mount and how you shoot. Ideally for a shotgun your nose should be between 1¼" to 2" from where your thumb knuckle meets your trigger finger hand.

If you are shooting a rifle with a mounted scope you do have a little room to move if your scope is mounted correctly but you must ensure you have enough space between your face and scope (commonly known as eye-relief), particularly if shooting rifles with a fair amount of recoil. It is so you obtain full use from your scope and are not hit in the face with the scope from the gun recoiling and your face being too close to the scope when firing.

Pitch This is the angle of the stock's butt/recoil pad in relation to the barrels. Pitch is a really huge issue for the ladies, because the average woman sports an extremely different chest compared to the average man. When shooting, you

Perfection comes from a shooter's desire to become adept with their gun...

So, we purchased a much lighter shotgun for me - the Beretta Silver Pigeon. I was taken to see a stock maker to have the gun fitted to me properly and I went on to win my first National Championship.

Before I continue, I will explain some of the critical measurements, why they are so important for proper gun fit and how to modify them for a woman.

want to have as much surface of the butt/recoil pad as possible to be comfortable and to avoid the gun 'jumping' with recoil when shooting.

The angle of the butt will affect how high or low the gun shoots as well as the amount of recoil felt, especially at the face. Naturally, the angle for a woman's pitch will be different from a man's for reasons I mentioned earlier. Generally, women (and some men) with larger chests require more negative (down) pitch and women with smaller chests (and most men) require more positive (up) pitch, meaning the butt of a stock won't be as angular.

Pitch and cast also work together here because with the proper combination, you will have a much more comfortable stance and this helps combat things such as canting the barrels, inconsistent gun mount and excessive cheek-slap.

Cast This is when a stock is bent slightly to the left or right of the barrel-line. Cast allows the gun to sit into the shoulder pocket while permitting the shooter's eye to align with the sights (figure 3). Many guns are 'cast-off', meaning that they slightly bend to the right. Although you can order some guns

with a left-handed cast (cast-on), it is more common for them to be cast-off to cater to a wider right-handed market. This impacts on women quite considerably because many women are left eye-dominant (see AWS edition 1) and may require a stock to be cast-on. Changing the cast on a gun can be difficult so it is important to note when you are purchasing a firearm that's right for you.

Drop at comb This is the distance between the front of the stock's comb and the top 'rib' of the gun's barrel(s). Off the shelf guns generally have combs too low for women (figure 1) because we tend to have longer necks and higher cheekbones than the average male, resulting in many women lifting their head off the gun in order to acquire the target and this will not help with your shooting performance.

There are many ways to fix this without going to a stock maker such as purchasing an Accu-Riser, stick on rubber/gel pads or neoprene covers for your stock. But a more suitable alternative might be to have an adjustable comb fitted to your gun.

A more popular option is to have a Monte Carlo stock on your gun (figure 2), which

means your stock has a higher cheekpiece while keeping the actual length of the butt/recoil pad standard to avoid the collarbone. Allowing the gun to still fit well into the shoulder while having a higher comb is popular among top female (and some male) shooters around the world.

Grip The size, angle and type on a gun will affect the LOP and the angle of a shooter's wrist. The average woman's smaller hand stipulates that the grip be narrower for better comfort and control. For shotgun and rifle shooters, this not only applies to a woman's grip on the stock, but on the fore-end too. There are many types of grips to choose from and the grip on my shotgun is made exactly to fit my hand, which is becoming more popular. A grip choice is personal and the best is the one that puts your trigger finger in the proper correlation to the trigger.

All of these touch points can be changed by going to a professional stock maker to ensure that your gun fits you correctly. However, these points are not the entirety of a correctly fitted gun. Weight and balance play a pretty important role too, which is something a coach/trusted friend/stock maker can make suggestions on.



Perfection comes from a shooter's desire to become adept with their gun, and this only comes from consistency. Your gun must become an extension of your body. Positioning it correctly each time has to be muscle memory and only a correctly fitting gun will allow that.

We are all built differently, therefore our guns must all be built differently too.

It is interesting to see the industry noticing that women shooters are currently the largest growth sector of our sport. And when women become involved, families do likewise and this is what we need for our sport to grow. More

manufacturers are actually putting a lot of thought into the different aspects of women's shooting, gun fit in particular, rather than just slapping on some pink camo and calling it a female's gun.

There is real value in catering to women looking to buy something off the shelf that will fit them better than what was previously on offer. The introduction of the Weatherby Camilla (see AWS edition 1) and Beretta's Vittoria 690 series (page 7) punctuates this.

Personally, I have an EvoComp stock on my shotgun. This is a fully modular stock that allows me to make alterations quickly without having to cut up the wood stock my Perazzi came with. It was ideal for me as I was competing heavily during my teenage years where body changes occur almost on a daily basis. Be warned - they are very pricy but it's a good example of how important gun fit is.

Don't think that you only have to consider gun fit once and then never look at it



The fully modular EvoComp stock.

again. It is something you should check on after every major change in your physicality or after a long break away from shooting. This was brought home once again recently after I picked up my shotgun for the first time in 18 months to shoot a

state competition. After only my first 25 targets I began to develop a soreness in my cheek, and by the end of the first day I had a swollen face and was developing a nasty bruise (left).

With two more days and 125 more targets to go, this was not ideal and I realised that my gun mustn't be fitting me properly anymore. All it took to correct the issue was changing the pitch by only 2mm. This shows that even the smallest of differences can make the biggest of impacts and it's all about the fit.



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Trophy with a twist

Chris Redlich

With words of reassurance in my wife's ear, she prepared herself for the shot. When the chosen goat stood up she was to take it cleanly with a broadside shot through his shoulder. The mob of bedded-down goats started to stir and just as Sue-Ann began to place her finger on the trigger, the animals were off in a hurry and her shot was blocked by another goat. A few wallabies bounding in from the opposite direction was all it took to spook the goats from their sleep in the shade under a large bull oak tree.

Moments earlier we had just finished a stalk to within 100m of the goats. Myself and the family were out exploring the back blocks of a remote western Queensland property when a mob of big billy goats caught our attention. I glassed them and made the assessment they would be worth investigating. Most of the goats had above average horn size and some of trophy potential. My wife grabbed her custom Savage Weather Warrior in 7mm-08 Rem and off we went. The children made use of the shade while we took off in the direction of the goats. The billys appeared to be on a mission and weren't hanging around for introductions. We used the tree line near the ute to our advantage before we advanced over approximately 400m of open ground.

It was mid-afternoon and we were well lit by the afternoon sun. We kept a low profile, walking in and out of deep melon holes and using the odd dead tree for cover until we made our way to a long strip of pulled timber. Thankfully, we arrived undetected and used the timber to close the gap towards the direction of the unsuspecting goats. We found a comfortable firing position along a log with another to sit on. Using binoculars to assess the billys'



A big billy with a full curl on his right-hand horn was a unique trophy...

trophy potential, we discovered an unusual goat in the mob, worth a closer look. After some careful glassing, my wife made her mind up that a big billy with a full curl on his right-hand horn, like a Merino ram, was a unique trophy worth taking, especially for a first.

Well, the wallabies succeeded in blowing the hunt that afternoon and although we attempted to follow the goats for some distance we just couldn't work our way to within a safe shooting range. We had come

so close but it wasn't to be. Back to the ute and back to the drawing board. My wife was now bitten by the trophy bug and she wanted that goat for taxidermy. This was day one of our western hunt in the September school holidays and little did we know at the time how elusive this billy was going to become. With the last of the day's light beginning to disappear, we took the long way home via a few water points to possibly catch another glimpse of the big billy goat's whereabouts, to no avail.

Right: A family affair with our hunting transport.

Far right: Sue-Ann with her first trophy goat.

Below: Sue-Ann waits for her chance of a clear shot at the goat, resting under the shade of a bull oak tree.



With the goat now located, we returned to tell Sue-Ann the good news. She didn't need to be told twice and we all departed in the ute. Due to the lay of the land I decided to approach the water point from a different direction with high ground advantage to glass from. The ute was kept out of sight under the shade of a tree, as we glassed the water trough. No goats! They had vanished in such a short space of time. This big billy was really giving us the slip but we left the vehicle for a hunt on foot. I couldn't make out the direction of the goats' footprints as they had been coming and going from all over the place and any signs of scat had soon dried up in the heat. Back to the ute and off we travelled for a vehicle mounted look. We searched slowly and quietly along many of the cattle trails and maintenance tracks and although plenty of goats were sighted, they were not the mob we were chasing.

The day was coming to a close and we began heading for home. Remaining vigilant with our travels, we spotted movement among the scrub. There were some big goats in this mob and although we didn't find the 'Merino' billy, we spotted a goat worthy of a trophy for Sue-Ann to

Sue-Ann and Rachel spent some mother and daughter time on day two, unsuccessfully attempting to track down the Merino lookalike. The bulky billy had left an impression on Sue-Ann and she really wanted to find it. After a few hours of spotting, stalking and glassing they returned empty-handed. The following day, our son Carl and I explored a long section of dry bore drain, known for holding some pigs. Although we saw plenty of sign but didn't spy a single pig.

The next morning Carl and I departed bright and early on bikes, to ease our sore feet. We explored the reverse of our travels the day before along the bore drain and to our surprise stirred a large black boar from his bed. He took off before we could drop him. A little later a mob of goats caught our attention as we rounded the bend on approach to a remote water trough. I raised my trusty Leupold bins and within a few seconds picked out my wife's billy.



hunt. My wife grabbed her 7mm-08 Rem and I brought my .284 Win for backup. The scrub was perfect to mask our advances and the wind was well and truly in our favour. As we closed the gap to the mob, straight away, I noticed a nice billy with a great skin to stalk. They were on the move and we did all we could to stay close enough to them for a comfortable shot. Just as we rested behind a tree branch they took off again, until stopping momentarily under the shade of a large Sandalwood.

From about 100m, my wife steadied her rifle and fired at the goat. He fell in an instant to a single shot of a 140-grain Nosler Ballistic Tip to the heart. The others dispersed and we made our way over to my wife's first trophy. Just as we arrived at the fallen goat, we noticed another mob making its way through the scrub towards us, unaware of the shot just fired. Without even picking up the binos we spotted the twisted horn billy in the mob. At a distance, no more than 100m, they moved 'in and out' of cover. We prepared ourselves behind a log for another shot but they became spooked and departed the area.

We would need to follow them at a safe distance but stay out of sight. They entered a heavily timbered patch of scrub but I could make out their position by the small cloud of dust overhead. We broke out of the tree line but the goats were still on the move and not slowing down.

We closed the gap enough for Sue-Ann to take a shot. Before the goats could disappear from us again she fired at the moving billy at 125m. The shot was true as the goat dropped from a double lung shot. With that, the excitement of her hard-won, unique representative billy overtook the pain of her exhaustion. She was excited, but now as the sun was setting, we had a lot of work to do. After many photos to capture the moment we caped the goat and removed the horns in the dark. The children pitched in and helped by holding the torches.

Before we left I bagged a curious fox with my .284 Win, as the pest was keen on cleaning up the remains. Later that night we laughed at the antics during the hunt but also reflected on how hard we really hunted the goat. It took us four days, but persistence paid off in the end. We were

rewarded with a wonderful trophy for my wife that she will never forget. "That's what real hunting is all about," I said.

To our disappointment we couldn't find the first billy of the afternoon's hunt in the dark and had to wait until morning. The next day we found him but had lost the opportunity to take his beautiful skin. The horns didn't go to waste and we removed them for a shield mount. This was our last day at the property and we packed up for home. The property owner remarked how they had never before seen such a curled set of goat horns. Upon our departure they said we were welcome back again whenever we would like. We gratefully accepted and pointed the ute for home with great memories of our few days away as a family.

Interested in hunting? Keep an eye out for the next edition of AWS this June where we provide some useful pointers to help you get started.




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Laetisha Scanlan 2018 Commonwealth Games Gold Medalist



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