

Top 10 psychological shooting tips • Getting started in hunting • Product reviews

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S SHOOTER

Women of Shooting
event the perfect
starting point

Issue 3 • Proudly printed in Australia

An official publication of the Sporting
Shooters' Association of Australia



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Editorial



Gemma Dunn

Fresh from her recent shotgun gold medal wins at the Qatar Open and Mexico World Cup, Laetisha Scanlan explains why routine and practice are so important in shooting, highlighting how process-based thinking is paramount. I delve deeper into the psyche to provide my top 10 psychological tips for shooting as I remind you that at the end of the day, it’s all about having fun.

Hunting may seem a little daunting to begin with but we take you through all the necessary steps, from selecting a suitable firearm to using the appropriate calibre and what else to expect. In line with International Women’s Day, we take you to the extremely successful Outpost Arms Women of Shooting event, which attracted many new shooters and provided a chance for those in the industry to let their hair down, with a good time had by all. We also feature reviews on the Swazi Shikari hunting jacket and Lowa Vantage women’s boots, which will most certainly help you out on that hunt.

For one lucky reader there’s also an Outdoor Edge SwingBabe knife and pouch prize up for grabs. 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

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The *Australian Women’s Shooter* is printed by Genii, Brookvale, NSW.

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Taking aim with Laetisha Scanlan



Why routine is so important

People always ask me: how much practice is enough? There is no set rule as to how many targets you should shoot or how many times a week you should train. Each individual is different in their approach as to what they think is beneficial for them. Many outside factors also contribute to training schedules such as time, money and commitments. What works for some may not work for others.

I believe after the fundamentals of shooting have been taught and achieved at a consistently high level, having a set routine that puts you in the correct frame of mind is far more important than just target practice. Don't get me wrong, practice is key to improving, but I see so many people at the range start to adopt bad habits because they are not practising with a purpose. Having a pre-shot routine allows you to practise positive cues that can contribute immensely when translated into competition.

Having the right routine for your own shooting is the tricky part – simply put, it is trial and error-based. What may work one day may not the next. It might take a while to develop a long-term routine that evolves with you.

So where to start? Identify and acknowledge why you miss in competition. I'm not referring to the technical side but more so the psychological.

Is it because you are counting targets? Is it because you want to win or beat someone else? Or is it because you have negative thoughts saying you can't?

Whatever it is, the most important thing is to recognise this so that you can implement a plan to reduce it happening in competition.

And that's where a routine will become your new best friend in practice. It will assist by taking your mind off those niggling thoughts that creep into your head and allow you to focus on the bigger picture.

I learnt a long time ago that results-driven thinking is my enemy. Thinking and wanting to win a competition affects me in a negative way. It puts unnecessary pressure on my mind because I am too focused on the outcome, therefore distracted from my original task – to shoot clays. I respond a lot more positively to process-based thinking, as does 90 per cent of the population. The moment you think you have it won is the moment you do not.

What do I mean by process-based thinking? This is the procedure of focusing on what you need to do to perform at your best, such as preparation and technique; it is everything but the result itself.

Having a set routine can help you develop a foundation of process-based thoughts and actions. There are numerous

techniques that you can incorporate into your routine, like simply repeating a key word over and over that triggers your mind to remain focused on the next target ahead. Or adding controlled breathing exercises to assist in helping you achieve the level of intensity needed for you to perform at your best ie, deep breaths to calm yourself down.

Whatever it is you decide to incorporate into your very own routine, keep it simple. The aim is to distract your mind long enough from the results-based thinking so that you can do your best to hit the target without unnecessary interference.

The ultimate goal of a routine is to keep you focused and prepared for what will come and therefore relaxed, knowing you have practised this drill a thousand times before.

For your routine to be effective, you should do it every time you train. It should only last a few seconds but completely prepare you for the task ahead.

At the end of the day, win, lose or draw, the outcome will always take care of itself. So if we stop thinking about the uncontrollable and start thinking more about what we can control, undoubtedly the positive results will follow.

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:

Outdoor Edge SwingBabe knife,
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Competition closes June 30, 2019

The Outpost provides perfect starting point for ladies

Dave Rose



Queensland firearms and hunting store The Outpost Arms & Munitions has established a trailblazing agenda since it came on to the scene in September 2017.

And the Rockhampton-based outlet has added to its ability to delve into pioneering initiatives by hosting its inaugural Women of Shooting event spread across two days last March.

In conjunction with Beretta Australia, The Outpost compiled a schedule designed to encourage ladies to become involved in the all inclusive sport of competitive target shooting and at the same time raise funds for the McGrath Foundation.

The initial program involved an auction to induce cash at a swish Ladies Night in the Rockhampton store on Thursday, March 7. This was followed up with coaching sessions and demonstrations in various shotgun disciplines at the SSAA Cawarral range throughout the next day.

To put the ladies through their paces The Outpost enlisted the services of four special guests. Heading the line-up was Commonwealth Games gold medallist

and *Australian Women's Shooter* columnist Laetisha Scanlan. She was backed up by expert help from fellow Commonwealth Games competitor Aislin Jones, Life of a Huntress identity Kadeja Assaad alongside Tasco Sales Australia Account Manager and renowned shooter Amanda Vallance.

The response to the fund-raiser/learning platform was overwhelming and Nathan Armstrong (pictured above), general manager of The Outpost, was delighted and is already looking ahead and planning the second Women of Shooting event for next year.

"The idea started out with us thinking about a possible print advertisement related to women that we could run in the *Australian Shooter* magazine," said Nathan.

"In doing so, we realised that no-one seemed to run events or opportunities for women to enjoy shooting as a sport. So rather than trying to convey our message in a print ad we decided to run an event. The planning started back in the previous October so it took us about six months to get it all ready."

This primary gathering was carefully pencilled in to coincide with International Women's Day and organisers set themselves the target of garnering \$5000 for the McGrath cancer charity via proceeds from the auction and donations made personally or online as well as \$20 for each ticket sold for the occasion. To the immense satisfaction of all those involved, this figure was smashed with \$6804 being counted as the end sum. Every dollar makes a difference and the amount collected will go towards assisting the McGrath Foundation place breast care nurses in communities across Australia. One of the prized items on offer was a framed official Commonwealth Games polo shirt which was signed by both Laetisha and Aislin and snapped up by one lucky bidder for just under \$400.

Reaction from the ladies in person and via social media confirmed that the two-day extravaganza was a resounding hit, both in terms of the charity pay-off and lifting the profile of shooting as a sport for women to embrace and savour. The number of tickets sold ensured that the whole affair was a virtual full house.

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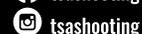
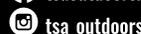
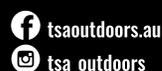
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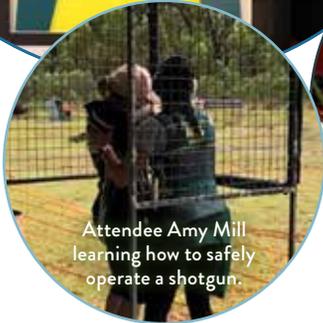
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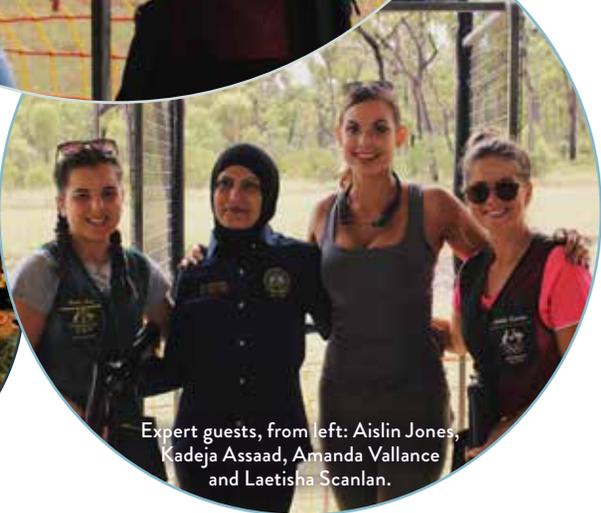
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The event raised close to \$7000 for the McGrath Foundation.



Attendee Amy Mill learning how to safely operate a shotgun.



Expert guests, from left: Aislin Jones, Kadeja Assaad, Amanda Vallance and Laetisha Scanlan.

“The feedback was really positive but we are already looking to change the format for next year,” said Nathan.

“It was deliberately timed to link with International Women’s Day but the weekday slot made it awkward for some people to get there. Next year the International Women’s Day is on a Sunday (March 8, 2020) so it will be a weekend event which will make it a lot more accessible to attend.”

For Nathan, the result was a heady accolade for all the hard work that had gone on behind the scenes. This all started with the build-up to the auction gala night as Laetisha, Aislin, Kadeja and Amanda were in the Rockhampton store during afternoon trading hours to meet and chat with customers. When the doors closed, it was all hands on deck for The Outpost staff as the shopping space was converted into a function room within a matter of hours.

“The whole team was on board and after we closed up shop early at 4pm, we had the shop transformed by about 6pm,” said Nathan.

“Kadeja in particular was a real eye-opener in that she stressed that a gun was a tool and not a weapon. She virtually redefined to a lot of people how a gun can be used.”

- Gemma, Rockhampton

The following day was just as hectic and rewarding with an early alarm call needed to prepare The Outpost marquee and arrange food and drinks stands at 7am with coordination from SSAA branch officials.

Once the action was under way, the guest experts took on the role of mentors for those who were conversant with shooting as well as total novices to the concept.

One of the newcomers who was glad she popped along to sample something different was Gemma Hiskens, a book-keeper from Rockhampton.

Gemma, 31, grew up on a property but said she had no real experience of shooting in a formal capacity. “I only attended the first function of the two days but found the speeches delivered to be super helpful,” said Gemma.

“Kadeja in particular was a real eye-opener in that she stressed that a gun was a tool and not a weapon. She virtually redefined to a lot of people how a gun can be used.”

Gemma said she would be keen to go to the next women’s festival if The Outpost ran another one.

“Clay target shooting really interested me and I would turn up again next year or even before. The whole event was wrapped up so well.”

Gemma’s friend Amy Mill was another tyro who was wonderfully taken aback by her two-day shooting debut.

“I have not been shooting before so I didn’t know what to expect,” said the 25-year-old teacher from Rockhampton. “But the professionals were very inspirational.”



“I think it’s really important to break down the barriers around shooting that are stopping females from getting into the sport. It’s safe, anybody can do it, and it’s a lot of fun! There is no reason why we can’t have more women in this sport.”

- Aislin Jones

It was the actual shooting activity which fascinated Amy. “I learned how to work a shotgun for the first time which was a bit nerve-racking,” she said. “I would say it was intimidating but Laetisha really helped me. Then clays came up and I managed to hit some after Laetisha showed me how to position my cheekbone on the gun.”

Like Gemma, Amy intends to give shooting another try “It is like you have an itch that makes you want to have another go,” she said.

Certainly, the efforts of Nathan and his crew were appreciated by those who were there and some echoed their thoughts through social media. “So inspiring to hear from empowered women,” said Catherine Brown on Facebook.

Another visitor who took to Facebook to enthuse about her outing was Lyn McGahan. “What an awesome event. Congratulations to Nathan and the team for an amazing experience. Have never been that close to a gun before. And had lots of fun shooting one.”

And what were the views of some of the experts on hand? As far as Aislin was concerned, it was time well spent.

“The event was an incredible couple of days and I felt privileged to be a part of it,” said Aislin. “And what better way to spend International Women’s Day than introducing an amazing group of ladies to the sport of clay target shooting.

“My hat goes off to Nathan and his team at The Outpost for running their first event of this kind, and for giving me the chance to be a part of it. I can’t wait to see what it will become in the next few years.

“I think it’s really important to break down the barriers around shooting that are stopping females from getting into the sport. It’s safe, anybody can do it, and it’s a lot of fun! There is no reason why we can’t have more women in this sport.

“I’m excited to see the number of women in this sport grow and I am thrilled to be a part of anything that helps achieve this.”

Kadeja was equally content that she had been able to contribute some of her time to addressing the ladies on the opening night and fulfil instructional duties the following day. The hunting aficionado serves on the committee of SSAA Sydney and organises shooting programs for ladies every quarter of the year.

“The whole thing was so much fun and we were also able to help the McGrath Foundation,” said Kadeja. “The store is amazing and the atmosphere there and on the range made me feel like I was right at home with the participants and fellow SSAA colleagues.”

Kadeja juggles a busy lifestyle as a single mother to four children and full-time manager of a car store as well as finding time to hunt on her property in the Upper Hunter which is a near five-hour drive from the family home in semi-rural western Sydney.

“I was happy to open up to the ladies and let them into my life,” said Kadeja. “My children come hunting with me and from an early age I taught them the safety aspects of firearms. If they see it is safe for their mother to do it, then it shows they can do it as well. I think it is important to be a friend to your children as well as a parent.”

Kadeja’s refreshing outlook captivated many of the audience when she delivered her opening night talk.

Laetisha’s shooting know-how was in big demand by the participants and she was only too willing to pass on advice.

“I was so proud to be part of an event purely dedicated to promoting and encouraging women in shooting,” she said. “Nathan and the team from The Outpost did an amazing job with the gala night and range day. I hope it continues to go from strength to strength.”

If things work out, Laetisha’s wish could become reality. This bold undertaking by The Outpost deserves to evolve into an annual happening and further bolster the firm’s reputation since its emergence only a few years ago. The opening of a second branch in Emerald last November shows that the management panel are intrepid enough to take risks. In this case, such a proactive mindset seems the perfect vehicle to enhance the status of female shooters in Queensland and beyond.

In fact the Emerald store is also flying the flag for women shooters with a majority female team helping to run the show. Amy Richardson and Nicola Batchelar are pivotal members of the Emerald set-up, both in managerial and customer service roles. Together with Earl Robinson they make a great combination and the three of them are enjoying being a part of the shooting community in the Queensland Central Highlands.

Swazi Shikari jacket

*the right
fit for
hunting
outings*



Gemma Dunn

I think we can agree that New Zealand has a fine reputation for being able to produce quality, hardy and reliable clothing for hunting – no matter what season you find yourself enjoying.

A company that not many in the Australian shooting world would easily recognise (but should) is Swazi. This is a native New Zealand firm making durable outdoor wear. Swazi is so home-grown it says the products are ‘made by a passionate bunch of people who live close by – in fact so close by that many of them walk to work every day.’ Swazi believes with this comes excellence and longevity with its items that far outweighs garments made offshore for less money.

Swazi has recently released a line of jackets named Shikari. These are ‘designed from the ground up – by women, for women who love to hunt’ and *Australian Women’s Shooter* was allowed the chance to put one of these outfits through its paces in the field.

The first noticeable thing about the jacket was its ‘feel’ when worn. Many thick, wet-weather jackets can give you a sense of being wrapped in a plastic bag due to lack of breathability. Also, usually warmth equals bulk and restricted movement while manoeuvring. Moreover, generally, neither actually do a lot for keeping you dry and warm in the end. The Shikari

jacket does both jobs but feels light and allows a good range of movement when on a hunt.

The other features of the Shikari jacket I found particularly useful were the peripheral hood, the abundance of pockets and the drawstring at the waist to keep the jacket from bunching up at the shoulders (which is annoying when you need to quickly hoist your gun). The hood worked well to keep the rain off my face but not interfere with my line of sight and the pockets were a great size for holding extra magazines or ammo boxes to reload while out and about.

The length of the jacket was also handy, as you find yourself in all sorts of shooting positions while hunting. The extra length provided the required body coverage for warmth and keeping dry no matter what stance or posture.

The Shikari jacket comes in two colours: olive and tussock green. On a personal note, I chose tussock green to try as I thought it would blend better with the vegetation I usually hunt in. Even though I have a selection of camo clothing for hunting, I like to own apparel that is not overly hunting-specific so I can also wear it at the range or camping. Therefore, as I usually hunt at night, dusk or dawn I find something in a neutral green works well most of the time.

The major thing about the jacket for me was all about the quality of materials and the production. For example, the seams of the jacket are tape sealed for extra waterproofing, ensuring endurance and delivering on the promises made by Swazi for its clothing. There were lots of little factors

about this jacket, just like the protective tape sealing, that were apparent the more I looked at it. And it's the tiny points that make the biggest difference, right?

Overall, I found great value in the Shikari jacket. It is extremely comfortable to wear, didn't restrict me in my hunt, and kept me dry and warm without that 'in-a-hot-and-sweaty-poncho-at-the-footy' feeling that some cheaper materials can give you. The cost of this jacket (as currently listed on swazi.co.nz) is \$NZD 713.99 (\$AUD 675*).

Even though the price is considerably higher than I would normally pay for a jacket, the Shikari offering is certainly one that seems as though it will last you a lifetime and you'll definitely feel great when using it, which is why I would still recommend it.

It is the first thing that is placed in my clothes bag whenever I go hunting or clay shooting and I often just wear it camping too.



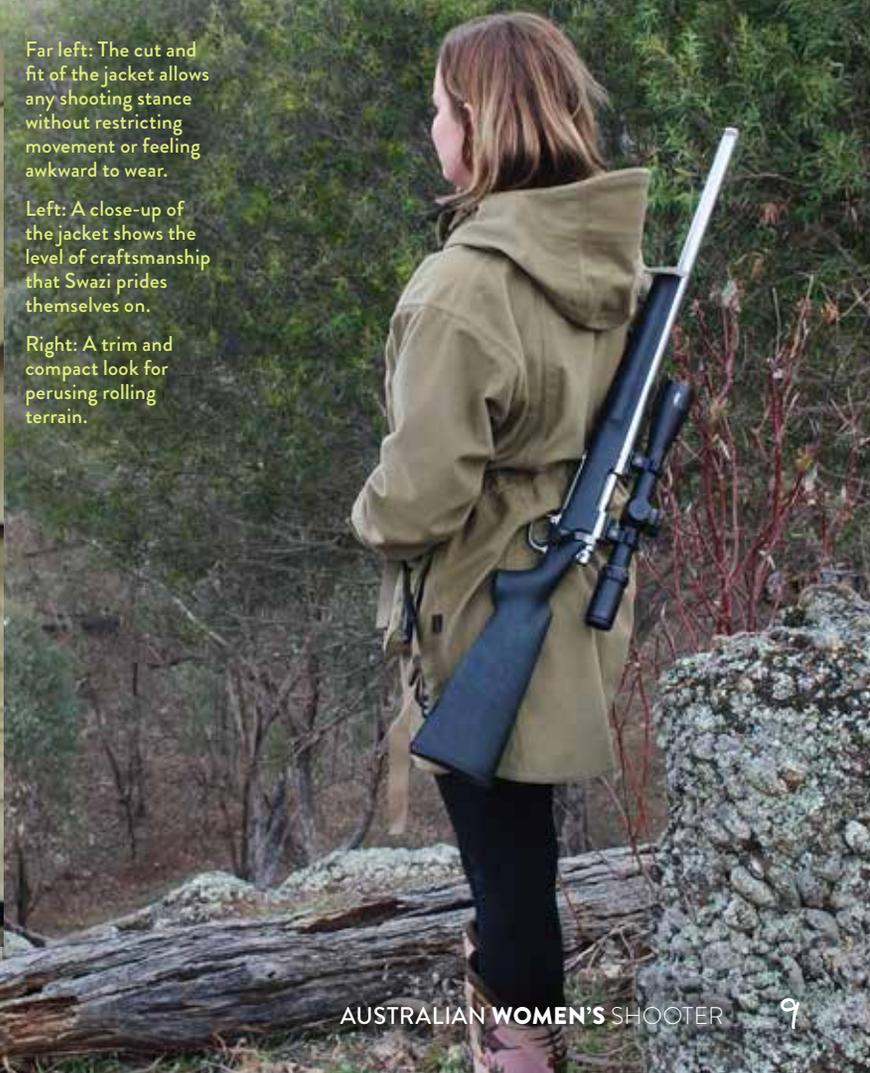
Above: Tussock green colouring blends well with a lot of eastern Australian bushland.



Far left: The cut and fit of the jacket allows any shooting stance without restricting movement or feeling awkward to wear.

Left: A close-up of the jacket shows the level of craftsmanship that Swazi prides themselves on.

Right: A trim and compact look for perusing rolling terrain.





Top 10 psychological *tips for shooting*

Gemma Dunn

Jodi Lyall takes a breath and focuses on her process to keep her mind quiet during international competition.

There are a few key factors that make or break a shooter's performance. It is important as a beginner to build a good foundation in the four main elements of shooting: target acquisition, equipment, mind and skill. Once these cornerstones are formed, they will allow you to continue to develop as a shooter for many years to come.

Previously in AWS I've covered cross-dominance and correct gun fit for women shooters. Now it is time to examine the mental side of shooting sports. For this practical piece, I will be outlining what I think are the top 10 most important psychological knacks to learn and train to become a better shot.

Throughout my experience in shooting, there have been many psychological traits I have had to adopt to be a better competitor. In terms of pinpointing just 10, it is a lot more complex than it seems. New shooters are going to have a different set of factors and hurdles to that of the experienced shooter. The veteran shooter who isn't shooting up to their previous standard because of age,

physical ability, changes in their capability to maintain attention or health problems, will also have a different set of dynamics from the others. So too will the shooter who is returning after a break or coming back from an illness or accident.

Here are my top psychological factors/hurdles to a shooter's performance on the range with a small insight into how you can train to overcome them.

1. Goals Regardless of your ability and experience (or inexperience), having an idea of where you want to reach with your shooting is important. Set goals and make sure they are **specific** to you and your sport. Make sure they are **measurable, achievable** and **realistic**. Lastly, you should set a **time frame** for your objectives where you can so that you can evaluate your performance and the appropriateness of the goals. Coupled with goal setting, you must also make a plan to achieve these aims and then commit to the plan.

Goal setting has always kept me in check throughout my shooting career. In hindsight, there were many times where some of my ambitions probably weren't overly achievable in the time frame that I had allocated. Goal setting has allowed me to learn a lot about myself, not only in shooting but in everyday life too.

2. Keep a journal It is impossible to effectively evaluate your goals unless you have the empirical data to go back over. You should be looking for where you performed well and not so well, what you should keep doing and what needs to be changed, trained for and practised.

Looking back on some of the journal entries I made as a junior, I can see how far I've come in my 10 years of shooting. Completing a journal has also pointed out some recurring problems in my shooting that I am now aware of, to which I have set goals for and I can work on in my training. I have a great journal template – just email aws@ssaa.org.au and I can send it to you.

3. Pre-shot routine

Whether you shoot clay targets, rifle, pistol or hunt, whether you play golf, bowls, snooker or darts, you need to have a routine before every shot. A pre-shot routine enables you to go over the basics. Are my feet in the right position? What is my gun hold position? What is the point where I will see the target clearly and be able to focus on it? Where is the kill point? Where do I follow-through to? Sometimes the pre-shot routine might involve a relaxation strategy such as centring, or a visualisation technique, or a key word or phrase.

I was first introduced to this concept at a national training camp as a junior, but since then and after spending time travelling and working alongside Olympians and world-class shooters the emphasis on a pre-shot routine has followed me throughout my entire shooting journey. It is something that I am still working on, but I also know that I can rely on it when I am under pressure in competition.

Next time you are at the range, take a look around you and see if you can spot others' pre-shot routines. When I shoot, you can bet that nearly every time it is my turn to shoot I have touched my ponytail (to make sure it's out of my way), secured my glasses and am taking deep breaths. These are all part of my pre-shot routine.

4. Keeping the mind quiet

You cannot focus on the target if there is a continual dialogue going on in your head. Your mind giving you instructions on what to do will not help you hit the target. Negative self-talk that recalls past failures or judges your self-worth based on your score will not help you hit the target. Techniques such as visualisation (see the pictures of you hitting the target), humming, focusing on some sensory experience in the here and now, and catchphrases all help to keep the mind quiet.

5. Staying in the here and now

To shoot well, you need to be in the **present**. When you let your mind go back to some other time, some other shoot or a target you missed

five attempts back, you will be shooting in the **past**. Shooting in the past leads to you making judgments about your ability or your self-worth as a person and a shooter.

When you focus on what happened in the past you will miss, because you are not concentrating on the target right in front of you. Shooting in the **future** can also be a problem. Thinking about the score, the result, the trophy or the prize money, will also take you away from the job at hand. Shooting in the future leads to anxiety and worry.

6. Focus on the process

If you do this, the outcome will look after itself. By that, I mean if you only think about the process of shooting the target, you will most likely hit it. The process involves the pre-shot routine, making sure you are set up properly, staying in the present, having fun and enjoying the sensory aspects of shooting, such as the feel of the sun on your back, the wind, the noise, smell of the gun being fired and the recoil.

Focusing on the process can include your shooting positioning, which can be practised in training so it comes naturally.



The opposite of being process-orientated is to be product-orientated. This is where you are focusing on the score, the prize, or on the feeling you gain from winning or beating others. Focusing on the product will take you away from the present and you will be shooting in the future.

7. Take it one shot at a time

Rather than expect to shoot a perfect score or perfect round each time, compete with the expectation to shoot one target, 25 times as an example. This will keep you in the present and focusing on the process.

This not only works when you are in competition or training, this also works with everyday life. Have you ever felt seriously overwhelmed by your mental to-do list? Having a list of all the things you need to achieve can help, but looking at it in its entirety will only ever cause you more stress. Work on one task at a time if you can and before you know it, you are binning the completed list.

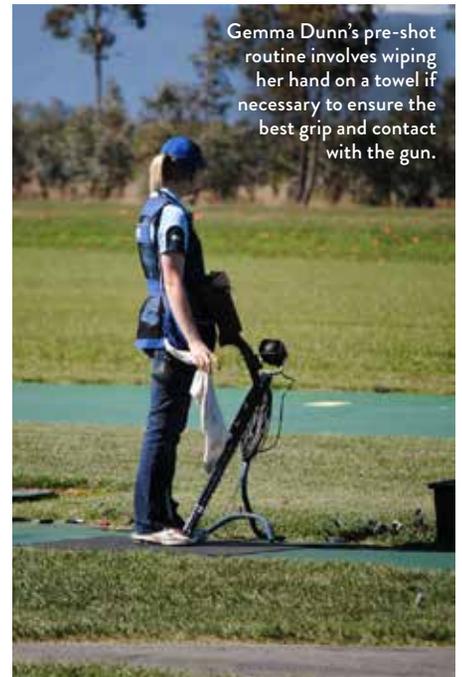
8. Breathe This should be self-explanatory but when people 'choke' it is because they do not breathe. As you are reading this take three deep breaths: breathe in and out, breathe in and out, breathe in and out. Now do that for the rest of your life! Breathing and relaxation go together. Relaxation is a good method of staying in the here and now.

9. Have fun Remember shooting is a sport. Have fun, be sporting and enjoy yourself and do not interfere with others enjoying themselves.

10. Perfect practice makes perfect If you are going to practise, make sure it is perfect practice. Do not practise mistakes or poor habits, do not do it half-heartedly or to

just go through the motions. Make sure you also know the difference between practice and training. Training is about learning a new skill or technique and practice is generalising that skill or technique into your shooting.

It is important to note that no one factor is more important than any of the others. You need to accommodate all 10 issues and make sure that they are integrated into your shooting every time you compete or practise. By continuing to work on these skills, you will provide yourself with a good foundation to rely upon in competition or out in the field.



Gemma Dunn's pre-shot routine involves wiping her hand on a towel if necessary to ensure the best grip and contact with the gun.

Lowa Vantage GTX women's trekking boots

Christie Pisani

My first trek in the stylish Lowa Vantage GTX boots was through the hot and humid tropical reaches of Cape York.

Thankfully, the Vantage boots look good with shorts and offer a Climate Control System. In a location where a pair of thongs is the footwear of work and leisure, it was important to have a boot that would withstand the problems of sweating peripheries without needing to bring a year's supply of socks along on the trip. Perforations in the boot's lining allow air to enter, pumping heat and moisture back out. Yet the boots remain waterproof, thanks to the Gore-Tex lining.

For any woman who spends her work days with toes jammed into the confines of a high-heeled shoe, the freedom from a wide-toed boot is indescribable. The Vantage's wide toe is designed with the freedom-seeking woman in mind.

The high ankle support has two benefits: ankle support and protection from snake bites. While not a formally documented (or publicised) statistic, women tend to suffer snake bites around their ankles, while a proportionate amount of men are



bitten on the hands. Speaking of dangerous critters, it is also a fact that while out bush and in a risky animal situation, you don't need to run faster than your attacker, only faster than your hunting buddy. So, the huntress does not want to be wearing her hubby's hand-me-down steel-capped work boots in the wild.

The Vantage is not simply a smaller version of a men's boot with pretty laces. They're built for a woman's foot. We want a boot that is lightweight, that will conform to our foot and enable us to walk (or run) freely. The Lowa-Flex patented system is designed to allow for easier upper flex and reduced pressure transmitted down

the lace resulting in increased comfort for those longer treks. The leather/Cordura upper created a good flex in the boot and significantly cuts down total boot weight. At 1.32kg a pair, they're perhaps the lightest boots I have worn. This significantly assists with walking quietly through the bush during a stalk.

The insole, with a breathable top layer and slow reacting foam, delivers instant customisation to the foot. In other words, they are wearable straight from the box. No blisters – and the only 'hot-spot' encountered during the trip was being stuck out in the blistering Cape York heat without a cold beer.

Of course, any boot benefits from a wearing-in phase and I found that the process was assisted along by the addition of a good set of Scholl insoles.

The Lowa Vantage GTX boots are available online in a range of colours for about \$449-\$599, however the savvy shopper may be able find them cheaper. Alternatively, visit lowaboosts.com.au for various models with free shipping.

Getting started in hunting



Hunting with an experienced mentor can be a valuable way to learn the ropes.

Margaret Botha

I've been hunting for many years and am still learning something new every day, so if you want to go hunting the question is where do you start?

Hunting is not easy. Now I'm not talking about shooting, I'm talking about hunting. But remember hunting is not supposed to be easy. I also want you to realise that hunting is special and a true privilege.

Everything I know about hunting, I learned from my father growing up in South Africa and I found out the difficult way. I had to start from the bottom. First with a sling-shot, then an air rifle and after I proved to my father that I had what it takes, I earned the right to hunt with a .22 calibre.

Firearms safety was drilled into me and my siblings as children. If you didn't behave correctly, the firearm was taken away from you. I was taught to handle and treat a firearm, as well as nature and all living species, with respect.

The first steps

- ★ Start with a friend or family member who owns a legal firearm and accompany them to a SSAA shooting range. Check out the set-up and decide for yourself if you would like to learn to shoot. If fear or insecurity creeps in, you should not continue. Instead come back at a later stage with more confidence and then try again.

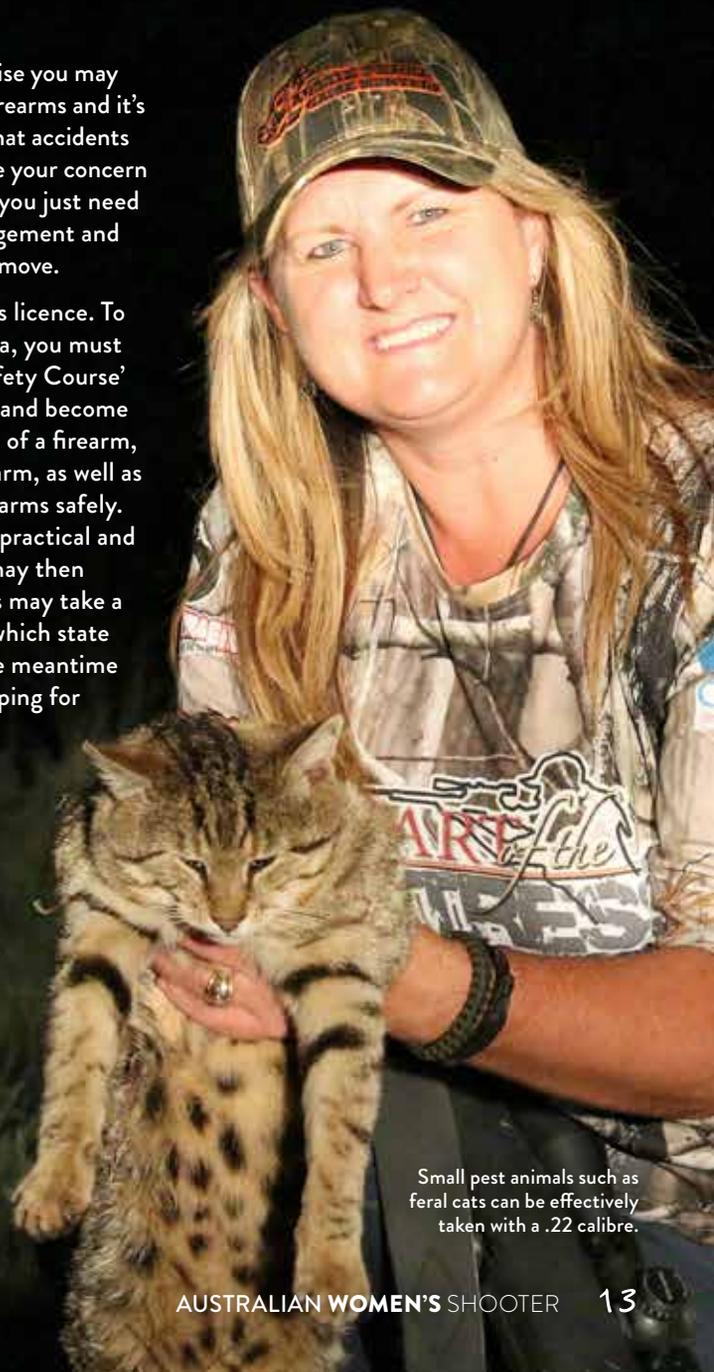
- ★ Ask an experienced shooter to explain the rifle to you... its various parts, how it works. Please, ladies do not let anyone

bully you into this. Otherwise you may develop an anxiety about firearms and it's when you become scared that accidents happen. But do not confuse your concern with inexperience. Mostly you just need good professional encouragement and coaching to take the initial move.

- ★ Apply for your firearms licence. To obtain a licence in Australia, you must first attend a 'Firearms Safety Course' where you will learn about and become acquainted with all aspects of a firearm, be comfortable with a firearm, as well as find out how to handle firearms safely. After you have passed the practical and theory components, you may then apply for your licence. This may take a few weeks, depending on which state you live in. However, in the meantime you can start window shopping for your first rifle.

Firearms choice for the beginner

It is like buying a car or a new dress. Each lady has her own preferences. Some opt for practicality, others look for a brand name. Usually when you receive good service from a certain manufacturer's product, you tend to go back regardless of the quality, price or make.



Small pest animals such as feral cats can be effectively taken with a .22 calibre.

Calibre

Women differ from men, and also from each other. Generally, a smaller built lady will choose a small calibre, while a larger or taller lady will like to handle a big calibre. However, a petite lady or strong, tall woman can handle any range of calibres if they have good shooting technique. For an inexperienced lady who wants to start hunting or shooting, I suggest a small calibre. One that is not too heavy and with little to no recoil, which is where the rifle 'kicks back' after a shot and this can intimidate or even injure a new shooter if they do not use good shooting skills.

I personally hunt with .243, .270 or .308 and my big calibre .375. It is a personal choice and practical for me. I hunt big and small game with those calibres and I can shoot short and long distances. I am a tall lady with broad shoulders so a large rifle is easy for me to handle.

As a beginner, I would suggest to first hunt small game species such as feral cats, rabbits, goats and foxes with a .22. This calibre is usually an affordable rifle for entry into hunting and shooting and what most young hunters will be given as their first rifle. You can perhaps graduate to fallow deer and pigs, with a calibre such as the .243. It can shoot longer distances and also offers the novice hunter a taste of success and an idea of what to expect when she decides to hunt a bigger species in the future.

Fit

Once you've decided on the calibre, you can consider the look of the rifle and type of stock. Some people prefer a wooden stock, while others favour a synthetic version. There are also many variations on stock colour and design. For example, some rifles are available in pink camouflage patterns.

The rifle should fit you well (see AWS 2). For a small framed lady I recommend you purchase a rifle designed specifically for women. Such a rifle is made shorter, lighter and has slight alterations to the model that make it more befitting for the anatomy of a female's upper body. Some ladies may have a preference for a particular brand. These factors are all personal and the huntress should try a selection of rifles to decide what feels best for her. If hunting for the pot you want to retain as much meat as possible. Therefore the choice of calibre is again important. If you use too large a calibre on a small creature you may ruin much of the meat, but too small a calibre might not be sufficient.

Game

The next important question is which game you will mostly target. For example, if you mainly shoot animals no bigger than a fallow deer, consider buying a calibre that's more suitable for that. But maybe you're going to hunt red or sambar deer? In that case you would want a larger calibre. You may consider buying two separate rifles. But you may be conscious of finances or perhaps find yourself hunting in an area where you run into both species. There are calibres that are quite versatile and you have to ask yourself what kind of wildlife you will shoot the most to determine which side of the spectrum you have to buy.

As far as the different species of wildlife are concerned, there is actually only one parameter and that is the bullet must have enough killing ability for the size of the species.

Ammunition

Heavier bullets tend to have higher ballistic coefficient (ability to flow through the air while maintaining velocity) because of their length. Monolithic bullets have the same length with a higher BC, but are lighter in weight. Heavier bullets will have more drop, but are less affected by wind.



There is no one-size-fits-all rifle for every situation or hunter...

Wide open spaces mean a longer shot so the need for a flatter trajectory.

Terrain considerations

1. Open country where shots are mostly over long distances of 180m-plus:
 - Flat trajectory.
 - Not wind-sensitive.
 - Enough kill ability (energy), even at a distance longer than 300m.
2. Thick forest where most shots are at shorter distances:
 - Slower bullet speed.
 - Ability to shoot fairly heavy bullets.
 - Enough killing power (energy) with a relatively low bullet speed.
3. Mixed field where you encounter both terrains requires a combination of the above, but especially the facility to handle a range of bullets from fairly light to heavy.



A hefty buffalo needs a big firearm and Margaret used a .375 calibre.

This is useful for long, open shots where wind may affect the flight. So the best solution will be to test your rifle with different weight bullets at longer distances. Lighter bullets will lose impact energy (force with which they hit the animal) at longer distances. High velocity is the selling point of a light bullet. Heavy bullets will maintain energy but lose velocity. So a medium weight bullet has a higher velocity and higher BC but the impact on the animal at long distances will be lower.

Making the right decision

If we have to summarise all this, the following is clear. Although it would be ideal to have a gun for every situation, it is mostly impossible due to various factors. Remember, we are talking about game from goats, small deer and pigs to larger deer such as sambar.

If you want to hunt bigger animals like buffaloes, or African species such as kudu and eland then you need to look at the much larger calibres like the .338 and above. But that's a subject for another day. The best calibre for the big game species is still debated even after all these years by hunters who have experienced dangerous episodes with bulky beasts.

There is no one-size-fits-all rifle for every situation or hunter, but knowing the pros and cons of each calibre and the ammunition will allow you to make the best judgment for yourself. My advice is to just go out to the range and try different rifles. Talk to other hunters and do your research and you will be able to find the one rifle that is perfect for you.

Once you have decided on your rifle you need to apply for a 'Permit to Acquire' (PTA). The firearms registry will then send your PTA to you, or to the nominated gunshop and you can go to pick up your firearm.

Receiving your rifle

Once you have received your rifle, take it to your local SSAA shooting range and sight the rifle in with two or three different types of ammunition and shoot at 100m until you obtain your best grouping possible.

Remember it's very important to practise on a regular basis. Through frequent practice you will improve your shooting

ability, your firearm handling and your shot placement. The more you shoot with your firearm, the more familiar you will be with it. Try to get to the shooting range every month.

With time you can shoot at different distances. You will learn to know your equipment like your scope. You will discern exactly where your bullet will fall and at what distance. It takes time to build up knowledge. Even the most expensive equipment and best brand firearms won't make you an expert overnight.

The most important thing is that you should enjoy hunting. Put yourself out there amid nature – it gives you a deeper appreciation for all sorts of life and also helps to keep you more in touch with your roots. I think you will agree that hunting is the most ethical way to kill an animal for its meat. Hunting is a part of life and there is no shame in honouring our long, rich hunting heritage.

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OCHP Chokes

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691 Sporting Vittoria



Semi-Monte Carlo Stock

Reduced Length of Pull

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"In 14 years of shooting Beretta I have always struggled to find an off the rack gun to fit me. I am delighted to see that Beretta address the female market with the new Vittoria. This gun is the answer!"

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