

SPECIAL EDITION INSERT TO THE AUSTRALIAN SHOOTER

THE JUNIOR Shooter

AN INTRODUCTION FOR JUNIOR SHOOTERS & HUNTERS



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Front cover photo by James Adams

PO Box 2520, Unley, SA 5061
Phone: 08 8272 7100 Fax: 08 8272 2945
Internet: www.ssaa.org.au Email: as@ssaa.org.au

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Editorial

Bob Green
SSAA National President



This issue, we bring you a special guest editorial from one of Australia's sport shooting ambassadors - Russell Mark. A SSAA member, Olympic and Commonwealth Games medallist, World Champion, Order of Australia recipient and regular contributor to SSAA's *Australian Shooter* magazine, Russell began shooting at 13 years of age. Back then, no-one could have predicted the journey it would take him on and still takes him on today. His is truly a success story of the shooting sports, yet it is one that every young shooter can aspire to. ●

Russell Mark
Competition shooter



My first experience as a competitive shooter happened as a 13-year-old at a clay target club in Geelong, Victoria. I pestered my father to let me enter a handicap competition that the club was conducting as part of its monthly shoot. We had a hand-cocked trap on our property in Ballarat and I was fairly handy at hitting most of the clays. The event was 15 targets in total and so as to not throw away any money, my father nominated me as a 'birds only' shooter, which meant I was only shooting for the targets and not the prizes. As luck would have it, I shot the only 15/15 score and because I wasn't in the event for the prize money, the guy that shot 14 took the dollars. That was the last time my father entered me into a 'birds only' competition!

Since that day, sport shooting has taken me all over the world many times. I was told by my mother at an early age that "Whatever you believe yourself to be, you will become" and it turned out to be great advice.

Always have a belief in yourself that you can accomplish the impossible. Have a positive outlook and try to avoid mixing with those people in life who aren't positive.

To be truly successful, you need to realise that you do control your own destiny. You are limited in your success tomorrow only by your own self-doubts today. ●

Tips for the new target shooter:

Working within the rules

by Rachael Andrews

Target shooting is known for requiring concentration, strength and endurance, but when you're starting out, it's hard enough just keeping the gun pointing downrange. As a young shooter, I found some of the disciplines hard when I started shooting. I wasn't physically strong enough to hold the rifle up for long enough to participate in the 3-Positional discipline and I couldn't do the Standing Post position without being in some discomfort. I had to change the disciplines to suit me and by working within the rules, I was able to take part and compete just like everyone else.

Being height-challenged, I had trouble seeing through the scope and for some reason, I was unable to close my left eye to see through the scope properly. After a bit of fiddling, I was able to have the scope moved closer to the butt of the gun and my sight problems were solved. To this day, I still can't close my left eye, but by cutting a piece of white contact to cover one side of a pair of shooting glasses, I can focus properly on my target.

There were positions in target shooting that I wasn't able to do purely because you had to hold them for such a long time. The Standing Post position in Rimfire Field Rifle was something I could never master and in an effort to find a way around leaning against the post and holding the weight of the rifle across my wrist, I pulled out the rule book. I found that I could pull back on the post, place the gun across my wrist and use my body weight as strength to hold the gun up. My new-found way of doing the Standing Post position actually turned out to be within the rules, as long as my feet did not touch the post.

Another handy addition to my target shooting was the use of a 'stand', which would sit under the front of the gun. At first, I would shoot with the support of the stand, but later on, I would put the gun on the stand between shots and when needing a break. When I was strong enough and



Adrian Shields shooting on a stand, supervised by his father Phillip, at the SSAA Moonta club.

confident enough to shoot without help, I always used one simple rule to make sure I could always be competitive. If you don't take your shot within five seconds of aiming, lower the gun, take a breath and start again, because the longer you wait to take your shot, the more you will wobble around.

When you are learning and growing in strength and skill, it is important to shoot within your capabilities. Do what you are comfortable with and sometimes pull out the rule book or ask the range officer to find out exactly what you are allowed to do. Sometimes, you may find an easier way to shoot in a discipline and one small change can make a big difference in your score. ●

Stepping stones

by Tim Blackwell

The first memory I have of firearms dates back to when I was six years old. A 'big' second-grader, I used to smuggle a few of Dad's shooting magazines to school where they would be produced at lunch-time and pored over by all of my friends. I used to highlight the rifles I was going to buy someday, as if that would somehow help me get them!

Growing up, I remember fondly when Dad's like-minded friends would come to our home and he would show them his restored No. 1 Mk3 SMLE .303. I would always watch from a distance, admiring the beauty of the old rifle. Years later, I finally got to shoot that rifle and my brother still shoots it on Anzac Day along with a few mates with their own 'Smellies'.

Dad still has the Lithgow single-shot .22 he bought to teach my brothers, sister and me to shoot and I hope to one day teach my children with the same rifle, if either of my two young daughters is ever interested. Many a good afternoon was spent out at the range with that old rimfire, shooting targets of various descriptions and being instructed in firearm safety. Being a single-shot, which



Tim Blackwell says that even from a young age, he has always preferred outdoor pursuits such as fishing and hunting. This was his record haul of yabbies (22 from memory) from a single drop net from a farm dam in western Victoria.

had to be manually cocked after closing the bolt, it was an extremely safe gun to learn with. We were handed one shell at a time, so once the shot was fired, everything was left in a safe mode.

I shot my first rabbit at age 12 while out spotlighting with Dad and his friends; it was a one-shot kill with the Krico .22, which has since been handed down to me. At 14, my first fox fell with the same rifle and the same tutor.

Whenever I could, I hunted rabbits and foxes with a few like-minded mates or with my dad and younger brother. It was a gradual learning curve, as I gained the complete trust of the adults around me. Nothing teaches an adolescent discipline, responsibility and respect like the shooting sports.

As with many shooters, the pastime was passed down through the generations, along with the firearms used. My first rifle was given to me by my grandfather, who grew up in South Australia's Mid North with a keen interest in shooting at a time when putting a few rabbits on the family table was heavily relied upon. The Stirling .22 self-loader he gave me was soon traded for a higher quality Winchester bolt-action .22; the bolt-action was without peer by my standards and much better suited to a learner.

My grandfather later passed on a beautiful 1907 Belgian Browning .22 self-loader, which had been handed down to



Shooting is a family pastime often passed down through generations. In this 1980s photo, Tim Blackwell's grandfather Jack Bennett fires an SMLE .303 restored by Tim's father.

him as a boy - a family heirloom tragically lost in the 1996 buy-back. I did get to take it out and shoot a couple of bunnies with it though and that makes me proud.

Just as the young shooter will have various rifles as 'stepping stones' along their journey, so too will the game animals they pursue change. Most of us would be no different - we started shooting rabbits with a .22 rimfire and then moved on to a centrefire rifle hunting feral game. Some of us then progress on to deer or even bigger, more exotic game, with bigger and more exotic calibres. I certainly am no different; for many years, I hunted only small game and never thought I would get the opportunity to progress to majestic big game such as deer.

Around my early teens, I made the best move a young shooter could ever make - I joined the local club, which, in my case, was the Naracoorte Smallbore and Air Rifle Club. It was here that I was able to mingle with like-minded shooters and burn off plenty of powder while developing my technique, all under the watchful eye of the senior members of the club. I had an old, accurate but very heavy BSA Martini International Mk11 .22LR rifle, with which I won my first shooting medals and trophies at the club's annual



Tim Blackwell aged 24 with his first fallow buck, taken at dusk with a 6.5x55 Swedish Mauser.

prize shoots. I thought I was doing pretty well until I shot alongside Olympian Libby Kosmala and found out how much I had still to learn! Wheelchair or no wheelchair, this lady can shoot and was ever friendly to juniors such as myself. I continued hunting and shooting at the club as often as possible, until I moved to the city to attend university.

During my few years in the city, shooting and hunting was forced to take a back seat and I still feel for hunters who are bound by city life. Upon my move back to the country, however, my hunting career really started to flourish, as did my interest in firearms and the way they functioned. Hand-loading was another interest that began in earnest and was probably the best hobby that a keen shooter could get into. After a few pitfalls and learning a few things the hard way, I learned to turn out a decent cartridge.

I shot my first feral pig at age 22 when hunting with good mates on a balmy October evening in western New South Wales. It was a nice boar taken with a 6.5x55 I had sporterised. The same year, we successfully hunted pigs on Kangaroo Island and the following year, I shot my first goats on another western New South Wales foray.

My interest in deer hunting followed and at a relatively late 24, I took my first deer, a fallow buck, with the same 6.5x55 Mauser. With the ongoing drought 'up north' reducing pig



Tim Blackwell at 15 with his BSA smallbore competition rifle and a haul of one silver and two bronze medals from the annual club prize shoot.

The Junior Shooter

numbers on the properties I hunted, my determination to hunt deer intensified and I have since successfully hunted several other deer species, including fallow and red deer in South Australia, sambar in Victoria and chital in northern Queensland. I have been lucky enough to study and photograph a lot of deer too, and receive a great education along the way.

I am fortunate enough these days to have access to a number of good private properties on which to regularly hunt everything from rabbits and foxes to pigs, goats and deer. I am greatly appreciative of the farmers who trust me on their land and I make every effort to help them out in any way possible, whether it is taking time out from deer hunting to cull a few foxes or helping out around the farm or workshop.

Like most hunters, I am fiercely protective of my hunting rights and it is for this reason that I am very selective of whom I hunt with. I will only venture afield with hunters I trust completely, both to do the right thing by me and the property owner and also to practise exemplary firearm handling procedures. As a result of this, there are only half a dozen or so mates that I do all of my hunting with and I feel privileged to have them as not only hunting partners, but good friends as well.

For almost a decade I have been a SSAA member, and I strongly believe that all shooters should belong to an organisation that they feel represents them best. As they say, strength in numbers. We need to look after the sport in this country, not only for ourselves, but for future generations of hunters.

All of this is not meant as a brag session because, after all, a lot of hunters have accomplished much more than I have and at a younger age to boot. I consider myself an average Australian hunter and my story represents how



These days, Tim Blackwell puts most of his hunting efforts into the various species of deer. He says his next goal is the 'Grand slam' - a trophy from each Australian deer species.

great hunting opportunities and experiences exist in this country and, with dedication, you might be surprised where you end up! We all have to start somewhere in the sport of shooting and our stories are all different. Shooting evolves with the individual over a lifetime - it is not like a footballer who is ready for retirement at age 30! As young shooters, the key is to remain patient and, most of all, enjoy the sport and the journey it takes you on. ●

Juniors-only competition

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

**Junior Swag Competition
SSAA Media & Publications
PO Box 2520, Unley, SA 5061**

or online at www.australianshooter.com.au

Winners randomly drawn May 10, 2009

WIN a SSAA Contrail tent swag

King single 2000mm x 900mm. Valued at \$180.



Tips for the new hunter: Plan for success

by Rachael Andrews

Stamina and inexperience can make for unsuccessful hunting trips when you are just starting out. Heading off on a hunting trip ill-prepared and uninformed would be a big mistake and for many juniors, listening to adults is the best way to learn. They have the experience and knowledge to make that hunting trip into much more.

Knowing the routes to take and the way in which the animal you are hunting acts is very important. There is no point taking off on a hunt with no plan of where you are going or where to look.

Short scouting trips during daylight hours, when most prey are not active, can help you learn where the animal sleeps, walks and feeds. Look for tracks, faeces and sheltered areas with good vantage points. These will make great places to sit and wait without your scent carrying on the wind.

When you do head out on a trip, which could take hours, think about what you are taking with you. Your pack or rifle may not be heavy now, but what about several hills and a few hours later? The bigger gun and plenty of ammunition might seem like a great idea when you start, but only take what you think you will honestly need and as big a calibre gun as you can manage.

Another idea is to dress appropriately to the weather and conditions you will be encountering. Be sensible and do not overdress, as you will warm up.

Once you are out hunting, it is a good idea to designate a shooting order, especially if you are in a group of three or more people. The designated shooter walks at the front of the group and takes the first shot when an animal appears. This kind of organising is a safety measure and should be organised before starting your hunting trip.

The most important thing to consider when hunting, after your own safety, is only taking shots where you have a clear line of sight and can ensure a one-shot kill. If an animal is running up a hill and is getting further away, you have less

of a chance that you will get a shot with enough power to cleanly take it. It is better to let the odd animal get away if it means you avoid hurting an animal unnecessarily.

Even the most experienced hunter learns something new every trip. The best way to make sure you always improve is to be observant, be quiet and learn from every bullet fired. ●



Short scouting trips during daylight hours, when most prey are not active, can help you to learn where the animal sleeps, walks and feeds.

Shooting with a scoped rifle

by North American correspondent Thomas Tabor



Cheri Tabor after despatching a prairie dog, which is a pest animal in the US. Cheri shows that a riflescope is a great benefit even on small-calibre rifles.

There are a lot of advantages in mounting a scope on your rifle. Of course, the most obvious benefit comes from the magnification it provides, which allows you to place your shots more precisely. However, there are other reasons why a scope can be beneficial, particularly to a hunter. In poor-light situations, as is often the case prior to sunrise and just after sunset and when hunting in dense cover, a riflescope has the ability to draw in light. This allows the hunter to pierce through the darkness and evaluate game where it was virtually invisible before. Being able to see your target better has another side benefit as well: when you can see your target better, it becomes less likely that an error in shooting judgment will occur.

Even though a scope can allow you to see things more clearly, it is important to note that you should never try to substitute a rifle-mounted scope for binoculars or a spotting scope. The only time you should be looking at an object through the lens of your scope is when you intend to shoot it. You must remember that wherever those cross-hairs are, that is where the bullet will be going if you fire your gun, either intentionally or accidentally. It would be a fearful thing to look across a canyon and see another hunter curiously peering through their riflescope directly at you! So, the rule that every hunter needs to live by is to never look through your scope at anything unless you are absolutely sure that it is your quarry and you are ready to take your shot.

Understanding field of view

A scope's ability to magnify the image of a target is certainly a great benefit to shooters, but that same magnification can work in a negative way. The area you can see while looking through a lens is called the 'field of view'. Largely because



Larger-optic scopes such as the Leupold VX-7L 56mm scope, bottom, have the ability to increase the field of view slightly over that provided by the smaller-diameter scopes such as the Leupold VX-II 40mm.

of the magnification, the area you can see is sharply reduced from what you would be able to see with your bare eyes.

To increase the size of the field of view, some scope manufacturers have increased the diameter of their scopes. This has resulted in increasing the field of view slightly, as well as increasing the amount of light the scope brings in. Nevertheless, the single most limiting factor to the size of the field of view remains the magnification of the lens. In other words, as the magnification is increased, the field of view shrinks.

Scope manufacturers generally rate the amount of field of view in terms of how many feet of habitat are visible at a range of 100 yards. For example, a standard fixed-power Leupold 4x33mm scope allows the shooter to see a spread of about 24ft horizontally and vertically when looking through that scope. On the other hand, a high-powered Leupold Competition Series 45x45mm scope allows the shooter to see only about 2.5ft at that range. In the latter case, you achieve a little benefit from the larger body diameter of the scope, but any advantage that this produces is far overshadowed by the huge 45x magnification.

Finding your target in the scope

Locating your subject of interest when looking through your riflescope or even through the lens of binoculars can sometimes become difficult. In this case, you can see the object perfectly well with your bare eyes, but when you bring the lens up to your eyes, you find yourself struggling to relocate it. The reason for this goes back to the reduced field of view through the lens and the fact that your eyes have strayed from their target. There is always a potential for this problem to occur, but there is also a trick that may help you to get on target more quickly and easily.

A very common mistake made by many people is not keeping their eyes focused on the subject. Whether you are a hunter trying to place your cross-hairs on the shoulder of an animal standing in the distance or someone attempting to spy on a bird through binoculars, it is important that you don't take your eyes off the subject. If you should look away just long enough to locate the rifle safety or to pick up the binoculars, you will likely lose your reference point and wind up aimlessly searching the whole countryside over in an attempt to relocate it.

However, by keeping your eyes focused on the subject while bringing the lens up to your eyes, you will maintain your focus and never lose sight of the target. As the lens meets your eyes, the object of your attention should be perfectly centred in the lens. If it isn't, simply take the scope or binoculars down, refocus your eyes once more on the object and bring the lens up again. This time, however, make sure your eyes stay glued on the subject throughout the entire time. Getting used to shooting with both eyes open will also help you to get on the target more quickly and it has the ability to increase your depth of field.

Shooting a scoped rifle

It is important to keep your eyes fixed on the target as you bring your rifle up into the firing position. This should be done without moving your body or head. Simply maintain your concentration and bring the rifle up to your shoulder and face without looking at it. If your rifle fits you properly and the scope is properly positioned, they should come up naturally and be aligned upon hitting your shoulder. Being familiar with your rifle and scope is very important and practising with an unloaded firearm will help greatly in becoming used to its physical characteristics and functions. >

The Junior Shooter

With the exception of the extended eye relief models, most riflescopes have an optimum eye relief of about 8cm. Making sure your scope is properly positioned is crucial to good shooting.

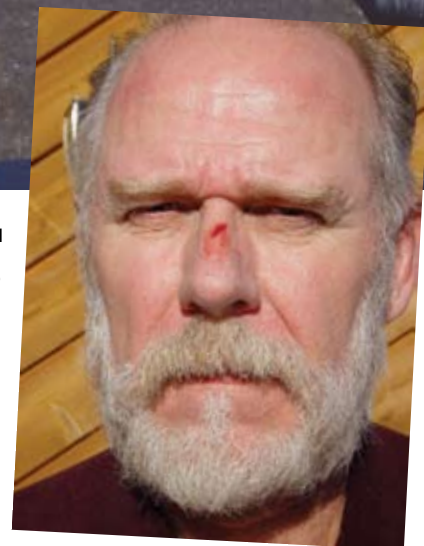


The distance at which a shooter's eye should be from the lens of a scope and still have a proper and complete view will vary. This distance is called the 'eye relief'. Most scope manufacturers will talk about the 'optimum eye relief' of their scopes, but that measurement is not an absolute and can sometimes vary up to about 3cm or more. As long as your eye falls fairly close to that optimum distance, you are usually okay.

Nevertheless, proper eye relief is crucial and care must be taken when mounting the scope on your rifle. If the scope is mounted too far forward, the size of the view will be reduced and a black ring can sometimes be seen around the outside edges. If the scope is too close to the shooter's eye, it can sometimes produce what I would characterise as a 'tunnel effect'.

More importantly, if the scope is mounted too close to the shooter's face, the recoil could drive the scope back into the eye of the shooter. I know from personal experience that is not a pleasant thing to happen. In order to eliminate such a possibility, there are two things you should keep in mind. Firstly, you need to make sure that the scope is mounted properly with the correct amount of eye relief. Secondly, be very careful to always position the rifle butt firmly in the pocket of your shoulder where it cannot slip under your arm as the recoil drives the rifle rearward.

Thomas Tabor knows well what can happen when a scope is mounted too close to a shooter's eye. This injury was minor as compared to what could result from a bigger-calibre rifle.



A scope can be adjusted for eye relief by loosening the scope ring screws and carefully moving it either forward or back. In doing so, you should be sure that you don't rotate the scope side to side, which would result in changing the horizontal positioning of the reticle. After making an adjustment like this, you should always recheck the impact point of your bullets on the range to ensure that the rifle and scope are still properly aligned.

Selecting the right scope

A lot of considerations go into selecting the proper rifle-scope to fit a shooter's needs. Certainly too much of a good thing, such as too much magnification, can work against you in many shooting and hunting situations. So, if you are considering a fixed-power scope, most hunters will usually select a lower-powered unit, possibly a 4x or 6x scope.

The eye relief of a scope can be changed without removing it from the rifle by simply loosening the scope ring screws and carefully moving the scope forward or back.



On the other hand, while usually a little more costly to purchase, a variable-powered scope holds a lot of advantages. In this case, a 2-7x, 3-9x or even 4-10x would be a good choice for most hunting situations. Variable-power scopes can be quickly and easily adjusted to a lower magnification when shooting at close range and up to a higher power when longer shots are likely.

Scope reticles can take the shape of a single dot of varying sizes, or posts, circles, multi-cross-hairs and standard cross-hairs, and they can come in various colors and virtually every combination of those choices. Probably at least 90 per cent of today's scopes are being equipped with 'duplex' reticles. Some manufacturers choose to call them by other names, such as 4-Plex, 30-30, Truplex, Multi-X, Plex and so on, but other than some being a little heavier and more pronounced than others, the differences are minor in nature.

If you looked up the word 'duplex' in the dictionary, you would find that it means 'two' and in this case, 'two' means two thicknesses of the reticle material. The duplex reticle is quite similar to the older-style cross-hairs, but the outer portions of the reticle are heavier. While it is a natural inclination to place the target in the centre of the scope view, the heavier outer lines of the duplex seems to make it even more natural and automatic to do so.

The manufacturer of the scope you select will often be based on how much money you have to spend. Like most things in life, the more money you spend, the better the product will generally be, both in dependability and overall quality. Below are a few things to consider when looking for a scope:

- Does the scope have an adequate factory warranty? How easy and quick would it be for you to get a replacement or repairs?
- When looking through the scope, is it clear at all levels of magnification?
- Is the scope equipped with effective waterproofing seals?
- Has the scope been filled with argon or some other inert gas to prevent it from fogging internally when subjected to severe or changing weather conditions?
- If you occasionally shoot at very close range, will the scope focus at that distance?
- Is the magnification right for your type of shooting?

A riflescope is a very effective tool that holds many advantages over traditional iron sights. In recent years, the quality and dependability of all riflescopes has significantly increased. Most shooters find that their accuracy and shooting abilities strengthen dramatically when using a scope, so why not try one for yourself? ●

Fox hunting

- expect the unexpected

by James Adams

The thing I find about hunting is that you can never predict what the outcome will be when you set off. I learned this particularly applies to hunting foxes from the first time I went out to try and bag one of these wily animals.

I remember I had just received my junior firearms licence a couple of weeks earlier and my father and I were in one of our favourite hunting spots in east Gippsland, a long, open gully that followed a creek high up into the timbered ranges. We'd been here before and stalked foxes a number of times, picking them up on the other side of the creek in the early morning as they were returning from their nightly hunts. My father had shot a couple of these at reasonable distances with his .22, but this time, I had my licence and was hoping to have a shot at one if we could pick one up and creep in close enough.

I was using a .22 Stirling with a 4x scope, which my parents had bought for my birthday and had already accounted for a couple of rabbits at home. As we walked down towards the creek, timber on one side and cleared farmland on the other, in my mind's eye, I was imagining walking down the gully and picking up a fox or two out on the creek flats. The last thing I expected as we wandered down the gully was to see two foxes appear out of the creek below and saunter up the hill straight for us, only about 30m away!

For a second, I didn't know what to do. The foxes suddenly disappeared, hidden by the hill's contours and some light scrub at the edge of the clearing. I looked at my father and he indicated he had seen them. He squatted down and I did the same. He looked like he was about to put his gun to his shoulder, but then he froze and just stared ahead down the hill. I looked and there was one of the foxes about 10m away, paused in mid-step, looking straight at my father. It hadn't seen me, and all I could see was his head and front legs. The rest was obscured by a dogwood bush.

I wasn't expecting this at all as I tried to put the cross-hairs on his head and keep them still. I remembered what I'd learned about taking my time and squeezing the trigger, but I was also nervous because at any second I expected



James Adams' first fox taken on the way to an intended hunting spot.

the fox to bolt. This was my first chance at a fox and I didn't want to miss. I squeezed the trigger and saw the fox do a somersault backwards and then just lie there. I'd done a clean head shot and bagged my first fox!

At the report, the second fox had shot off up the hill. While we watched for a moment to see if it would stop, it kept going until it was over the ridge and out of sight. Never mind, I'd shot one before we'd even gotten to where we intended to hunt, so it seemed it would be a good weekend for foxes. However, despite the great start, we never saw another fox the entire time! We bagged a few bunnies, but morning hunts, evening hunts and using the whistle failed to produce even a single fox.

The next fox I took was equally unexpected. I was at home on our property in central Gippsland and had taken the Stirling down the back paddock because there were a few rabbits living below one of our dams. Despite the paddock being open, there is an old stump about 100m above the dam, which we kept as a rubbing post for stock. It also made an ideal blind to sit and pop the rabbits from, as they never seem to look up the hill.

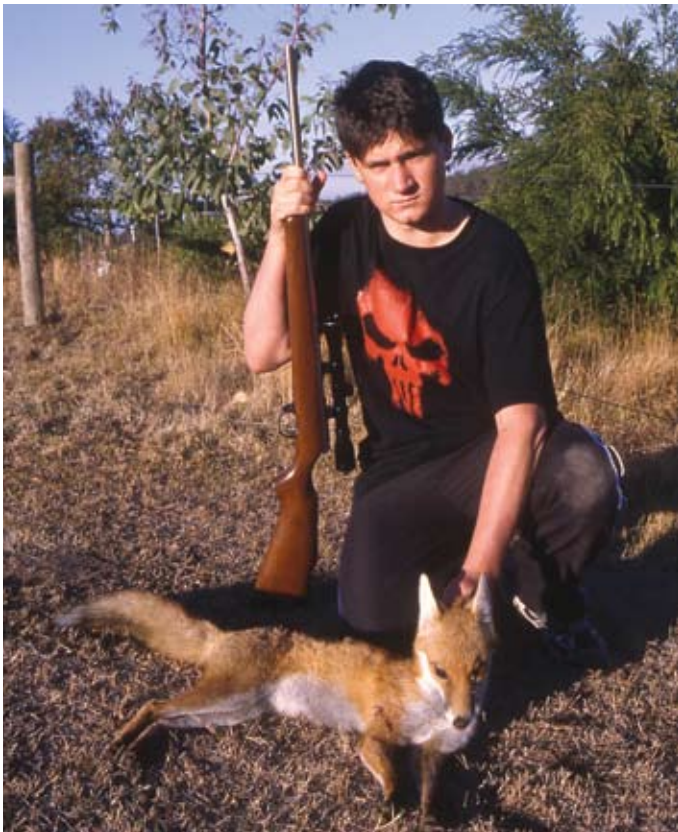
It was just after lunch and I had been sitting by the stump for a while waiting for a rabbit to appear, when, bold as brass, across several open paddocks, came a fox. It didn't seem



While other foxes on the hunt were impossible to get close to, fox number three stood and watched James.

to be doing anything in particular and I watched it through the scope as it headed across our paddock towards the dam. I was beginning to think it was going to keep on walking off the property, when it got to the dam wall and stopped to smell where a rabbit had recently scratched. With the cross-hairs on its shoulder, I squeezed the trigger and the fox collapsed. This was my second fox and I hadn't even intended to hunt for this one.

The third fox I shot wasn't entirely unexpected, as I was actually out hunting foxes, but it still surprised me by its



Fox number two was taken when James was hunting rabbits.

The Junior Shooter

behaviour. We were back in east Gippsland at another location near where we go to hunt wild goats. It was our last morning on a long weekend and we had awoken early to see if we could bag a fox in one of the blackberry-filled gullies near our camp.

We hadn't walked very far when we spooked a fox, but it saw us at the same time we saw it and took off at a gallop. A little further on, we stopped by some fallen logs and blew the fox whistle, but after 15 minutes, we decided that nothing was coming so we got up to leave. At that point, a wily fox that had obviously been watching us, took off over the hill. That was two foxes and we still hadn't got any closer to either of them.

We decided the foxes here were rather skittish and we probably weren't going to have much luck. We walked on for a couple of minutes when I looked across the gully to a patch of dead blackberries about 50m away - something had caught my eye! As I looked to the edge of the bush, I could see a fox staring at me through the dead bushes. I had the .22 slung over my shoulder, not really expecting to see anything. I eased the gun off and up to my shoulder and expected the fox to follow the trail of its earlier kin and tear off as quickly as it could, but it didn't - it just sat there staring at me. I aimed for the middle of its white chest and it went down without a murmur. Either it wasn't as canny as its relatives or perhaps it thought I couldn't see it through the bushes. Either way, when I thought I wasn't going to have any success, it became number three.

Just recently, I added a fourth fox to the list and while I was out hunting foxes, this one too surprised me by being somewhere I did not expect it to be. I was back near where I'd shot my first fox, but was moving up the gully along the creek, scanning the flats and hillsides for any sign. It was very cold; in fact, a little further up the ranges, it was snowing and the wind had a real chill factor.

As I got further up the creek, I came to a stretch beside the creek that I knew was quite boggy. I wasn't paying much attention because with the way the weather was, I expected any foxes to be on the hillsides away from the wet creek banks and if they weren't in some warm den somewhere, then they'd be out of the wind, trying to get some sun.

I was just starting to skirt the boggy stretch when a slight movement caught my eye. I looked through the scope to the middle of the boggy stretch and a pair of black ears with white tips just moved above the tops of the tussock grass. It was a fox and for some reason, it was curling up on a tiny spot of high ground in the middle of the bog.



Fox number four was not at all where James expected it to be.

Because I couldn't get a clear shot and if I moved up the hill it would see me, I decided that I'd wait for it to move. I edged over to a fence post and got into a sitting position, hoping the fox wasn't going to stay there all day. In the end, I waited for nearly half an hour. My nose was red and my fingers were almost numb with the cold. I was at the point of deciding whether to spook the fox and try to get a shot when it stretched and stood up, head above the tussocks. A shot to the chest from the Stirling brought it down clean and I had fox number four, but I still can't for the life of me work out why it chose such an uncomfortable place to sleep - at least I thought it looked uncomfortable. It just goes to prove you should expect the unexpected when hunting foxes. ●

Junior shooter's find-a-word

by Natalie Hill

Find the following firearm- and shooting-related words in the accompanying grid. Just to make things trickier, the words can be found horizontally, vertically, diagonally or backwards. ●

- | | | | | |
|-----------|--------------|--------------|-----------|---------------|
| Action | Centrefire | Handgun | Pull | Shotgun |
| Barrel | Choke | Hunting | Rearsight | Shot |
| Benchrest | Comb | Lever action | Receiver | Slide |
| Bolt | Conservation | Load | Recoil | Slug |
| Bore | Ejector rod | Magazine | Rib | Stock |
| Bullet | Frame | Muzzle | Rifle | Target pistol |
| Calibre | Gauge | Powder | Round | Triggervard |
| Case | Grip | Primer | Safety | Wad |

C	B	E	L	Z	Z	U	M	A	G	A	Z	I	N	E
E	M	A	R	F	S	D	H	S	B	G	R	I	P	C
N	C	H	O	K	E	L	X	D	N	U	O	R	O	J
T	A	R	G	E	T	P	I	S	T	O	L	E	W	S
R	L	I	U	N	H	A	N	D	G	U	N	L	D	H
E	I	F	L	Z	U	Y	G	A	E	I	E	L	E	O
F	B	L	S	E	N	K	C	O	T	S	J	U	R	T
I	R	E	S	V	T	T	L	O	A	D	E	P	A	G
R	E	A	R	S	I	G	H	T	M	U	C	R	T	U
E	C	Q	C	O	N	S	E	R	V	A	T	I	O	N
R	E	K	N	W	G	A	U	G	E	C	O	M	B	B
L	I	O	C	E	R	B	E	N	C	H	R	E	S	T
P	V	N	Y	T	E	F	A	S	B	A	R	R	E	L
L	E	V	E	R	A	C	T	I	O	N	O	F	I	O
T	R	I	G	G	E	R	G	U	A	R	D	A	W	B

