



# Gemma get your gun!

Using SSAA/Beretta custom-built rifles, Mark van den Boogaart takes Gemma Dunn on her first deer hunt

Like a good story should, this one starts over food and drink. Rum for me, wine all round and plenty of tasty morsels with friends old and newly met. What came of all that was a plan and as it progressed from a seed into something more tangible, two specific goals were agreed upon. The first was that myself and Gemma Dunn, former editor of *Australian Women's Shooter*, would go on a hunt with me acting as Average Joe guide. The second was we'd hunt with our respective SSAA/Beretta Australia custom-built rifles (see the May-July 2022 editions of this magazine) and, as a bonus, the hunt would also be the first time Gemma would use her rifle away from the range.

With that we turned to the logistics of when, where and who? When would be February so as not to clash with deer season, where would be around Bathurst on a private property with a healthy goat population and, if time allowed, a nearby public land block for deer. And the who would be Gemma, myself and Joe, a long-time good mate. Tie a ribbon round it, this job is done.

The day finally arrived and on farewelling the family I began the drive from Brisbane, my plan being to overnight in Mudgee and meet the guys in Bathurst the following morning.

## Getting there

After a long drive I met Gemma and Joe, we sorted a few things out and headed for the property, arriving just over an hour later at the farm gate then up a rocky track to the campsite. The site was a high, exposed clearing with panoramic views of the surrounding hill country and as it was still a little hot to set up tents, Joe headed to the owner's home to say hello while Gemma and I grabbed our gear and wandered off for a look-see.

Goats were in abundance and because of the numbers, rather than focusing on shooting we changed things up, found a well concealed spot and sat down to watch and listen. What followed were lots of questions, answers, speculation and observations about goats, their behaviour and shot placement. Thinking about it now, while the

temptation may have been to let the lead fly, that first interaction with Gemma, which saw goats wander to within comfortable bow range, was a valuable learning experience for both of us.

A little while later we set up camp, made ourselves comfortable and sketched a rough plan for the weekend. On our first day in the last hours of light we decided to head out for another active scout which proved a good move as we spotted goats and fallow deer. That was another first for Gemma whose only previously deer sightings had been them dashing across a country road and while we tried to take one, they proved too hard a target on that first afternoon.

Next morning we moved towards the river just for a look but knew that along the way there was a high likelihood we'd chance upon game, so it seemed a good plan. As we followed a creek that drained into the main water course the sides began to close in until we were under a significant rocky formation. Goats love rocks and sure enough there they were high up, a perfect opportunity for Gemma to take her first





**TIKKA**  
SECOND TO NONE

# SURGICAL PRECISION FOR THE MODERN HUNTER

## TIKKA T3x SPECIAL AUSTRALIAN EDITION WILD BOAR

RRP \$2,879

Designed in Australia for the demanding Australian environments.

Boasting the same 10-round, dual stack magazine from the T3x CTR with a lite profile and fluted barrel, the T3x Wild Boar is the perfect hybrid. A lightweight stalking rifle with an impressive magazine capacity and fantastic additions, including; a fluted bolt, second magazine and a 14x1 thread for securing your favourite accessories.

Orange grip/fore-end included as standard, or for those wanting a more subtle approach a black grip and fore-end is also included in the box.

**SIFA**

Shooting  
Industry  
Foundation  
Australia



Proudly distributed by

**BERETTA**  
AUSTRALIA



[www.berettaaustralia.com.au](http://www.berettaaustralia.com.au)



A significant storm would roll over our exposed hill site



The hilltop camp.



Well done Joe, that's two for two.

game animal. Picking her first target she lined up and fired, the shot from her Tikka T3x Varmint in .243 Win a good one and, after stumbling downhill, the goat gave out to the Sako Gamehead projectile.

While the shot was good the potential retrieval was most definitely not, so we wrote it off to feral pest control while Gemma lined up on the second. Another good shot saw the next goat drop where it stood so two shots and two goats for Gemma and the rifle, not bad for a shot-gunner! After the shots had reverberated around the hills we congratulated Gemma on her straight-shooting then had a bite to eat and discussed what had happened.

#### The river

On the walk back we spotted a mob with some reasonable billies among them so devised an elaborate (with hindsight a little too elaborate) plan for Gemma and I to shoot on the mob. But with hunters ready and video camera rolling it all went haywire as the goats chose to ignore our script and, seeing our chance slip away, I rose from my concealed position and fired a running shot on a younger billy, striking it in the neck. Spotting another larger billy I cycled the action and fired again, delivering another neck shot and while things hadn't gone to plan, it was nonetheless a good result with two more feral marauders down.

It was getting warm and in fact would turn out to be the hottest New South Wales weekend in three years so it was time to head for camp and sit out the heat of the day. What we didn't know was a significant

storm would roll over our exposed hill site and while it didn't wreck the camp, we had to take cover in our vehicles while the rain, wind and pebble-sized hail blew through. We then had about an hour's worth of light left so decided to make the most of it. Splitting up, Joe and Gemma headed into a gully system while I scanned a very 'piggie' looking creek line and while no-one had much luck, it was worth the effort.

For our last morning on the private block we again rolled out of camp just after first light. The storm had pushed goats into heavy timber close to camp and very soon into our downhill walk we spotted them. We continued single file towards them and from about 80m could see them feeding in a slight dip below the eyeline of the hill, Gemma taking aim to make quick work of another couple.

It was still relatively cool and with Joe on knife duty we took some meat and hung it in the shade before moving on. We dropped into the low flats and checked the water source before moving up under the trees of a reverse-facing slope to check for game. There were goats at least 500m up on the sunlit slope and they appeared to be slowly ambling down. Sure enough over the next half hour they edged ever closer until they were only 80m away with some younger ones within 30m. We remained still and spotted three bachelor billies, one heavily coated black and tan being particularly interesting.

On his way down he nudged a few nannies, thrashed a thistle and slowly headed for shade and water so I decided