

BUILDING YOUR BEST

WITH BERETTA AUSTRALIA

Part 3: The Hunt

Gemma Dunn

It's funny where this world takes you and who you meet along the way. Sitting along the Brisbane River on a balmy late September evening, we were having a meal and a few drinks among colleagues and friends. Mark van den Boogaart and I began talking about the rifles we'd built with Beretta Australia (see Parts one and two of the build in Issues 13 and 14 of AWS) and how they were performing. I had told Mark that I was yet to use mine in a hunting scenario, so this rapidly turned into a brainstorming session about how fitting it would be to wrap up the rifle build series with a hunt, but together this time.

Fast-forward a month or so and we had the plan. We would go just before deer season around February and to somewhere where we can hunt private and public land on the same weekend. So, Mark then introduced me to his mate Joe who had the perfect property in mind and the plan was complete.

We were hunting on private property from Friday through to Sunday morning, where we would then pack up and move onto Pennsylvania State Forest to hunt that Sunday afternoon and Monday morning before heading home.

Off I went for my NSW Restricted Game Hunting Licence (R-Licence) and completed the newly released R-Licence Accreditation Course for Penn. This was a great way for me to learn all things public land hunting in NSW and feel confident I'd be able to do the right thing on public land as a hunter and firearms licence holder.

Multiple Zoom meetings ensued with Joe

and Mark to finalise the last bits and pieces and before we knew it, the weekend was upon us.

Trip goals

The main aim for me on this trip was to see how the rifle performed away from the shooting range, in a hunting situation. Those who have read the previous articles might





The AWS rifle performed as expected on a couple of billy goats.



Two goats in two shots for Gemma.



Gemma was happy to be down in the cool by the river for a while.



A G.O.A.T. in its natural habitat.



Who wouldn't want to be out hunting with scenery like this?

SPECIFICATIONS

Rifle: Tikka T3x Varmint

Calibre: .243 WIN

Stock: Boyds At-One adjustable gunstock in nutmeg laminated hardwood

Scope and rings: Burris Signature HD 5-25x50mm with Steiner alloy rings

Bolt: Lumley Arms Tikka T3 titanium and carbon-fibre bolt handle

Overall weight: 4.85kg

Custom work: Barrel and bolt Cerakoting and fluting

remember that the rifle was built with the purpose of it mainly being used on the range, with the odd jaunt out in the field if needed, so I was excited to see how it had all panned out.

In Part two of the build series, I noted that even with the fluting, I still felt it was slightly on the heavier side which I knew could prove interesting when carried in the field. So, this in particular, was something I was extremely interested in determining once we'd moved out there. Alongside that, I was keen to determine whether or not the stock would still

withstand being carried around in the bush and be user-friendly away from the comfort of a bench.

Secondly, I wanted to experience the whole process of going hunting on public land and having my R-Licence. I had only ever been hunting on private property in Australia until this point and knew that the rules for hunting under the R-Licence regime had additional requirements.

Lastly, it's always good to expand your knowledge as much as possible in life so I was eager to go hunting with two extremely



Carrying all your gear in the heat is hard work.

knowledgeable and experienced companions. I just wanted to learn as much as I could from Joe and Mark.

The hunt

Let me just start with this. The forecast for the weekend was hot (37°C Friday, 39°C Saturday and 38°C Sunday), the most scorching weekend in NSW for three years. So that was posing a challenge ahead of the outings. Before I delve into too much detail about the hunt, it's important to mention that Mark has actually written a story giving us a day-by-day breakdown of what happens on the hunt in this month's edition of *Australian Shooter*, which is a great read, so I won't spoil too many of the details. Just make sure you check it out.

We arrived in Bathurst on schedule, grabbed

some last-minute supplies (and extra water) and off we went to the private property. We were there just shy of lunchtime, in the peak of the heat, and decided to set up camp first and wait for the temperature to die down before going on any major walk scouting for game.

After we were settled in at camp, we were off in search of game each morning and afternoon, sitting out the heat of the day to try and keep as cool as possible. Goats, pigs, and if we were lucky, deer were on the agenda at the private property. It was quickly apparent that goats would be the main game as they were prolific. I have never seen so many at once. We were focused on taking deer at Pennsylvania State Forest, where Mark was successful in claiming a fallow.

Over the course of the weekend, I downed a few goats. We saw a pair of fallow deer but

no pigs. I was mostly happy with my shooting. Not all shots will go 100 per cent to plan and I learnt a lot about how to approach situations differently in future, mostly from the sage advice given to me by Mark and Joe.

So, how did the rifle go?

Overall, the rifle performed as expected. I was using Sako Gamehead 90gr ammunition in my Tikka T3x .243 WIN and they functioned exceptionally well, again as expected. When setting up the rifle for that ammo, the groupings were exceptional and I was confident the pairing would be successful.

During the hunt, all shots were clean and there were no issues whatsoever to mention. This gave me all the more confidence in the moments it counted the most. There is something so good about knowing you don't



Mark with his fallow just as the sun was setting.



Mark and Joe teach Gemma how to harvest goat meat effectively.

even have to consider your gear when you're in the moment, about to take the shot.

The main issue I had with the rifle was the weight. As I mentioned earlier, I knew the weight would pose some sort of a challenge, but it was interesting to see how much exactly. Going into the weekend, I was aware there would need to be some considerations in my approach surrounding the weight of the rifle, including what shots were best to take and how it could be carried. This advanced planning aside, nothing will prepare you for how heavy your gear becomes when it's stinking hot and the terrain is so steep in parts. Although I love this rifle, at that moment on the side of a hill with even my hands feeling like they were 20kg each, I wished I had a lighter firearm. I reiterate though, that a lot of this was due to the environment we were in and not the rifle itself.

The other issue I had was again, surrounding the ergonomics of the stock. I really like the concept and the versatility that the At-One stock offers, but I think the edges would do better with being a little more rounded.

The Lumley Arms extended bolt was both a pro and a con on the hunt. It was great because when I reached for the gun in a fast situation, the bolt was always easy to grab onto and smoothly manoeuvre. On the flip side, coupled with the weight of the rifle, sometimes it limited the options I had for carrying the firearm. The extended bolt handle was the prime suspect for an interesting bruise on my hip after carrying it on my left shoulder for a short while to give the right side of my body some reprieve.

Overall, we need to remember that those aspects I had a bit of trouble with on the rifle are all things that make the rifle a great target item, so that's the trade-off here, I guess. It was certainly a motivating journey trying to find a happy medium between a target rifle that could be used when hunting.

As with anything that is designed to be a hybrid, there will be variants for each application. It will never be 100 per cent perfectly set up for both. But the way this rifle was built, coupled with the exceptional performance that Tikka is known for, I think

it's a combo that's as close as you can come to having the perfect hybrid. Well, for me it is anyway.

At the risk of banging my own drum a bit, I realise I'm a fairly solidly built female. I have been shooting for a long time now and know I can handle a fair amount of weight, so I am not sure I'd recommend it for anyone of any smaller stature than I am.

Finally, a huge thanks to Mark and Joe for an awesome trip and all their help. We vowed to try and do it again each year from here on in ●



Gemma field dressing a goat.