

HEY JUNIORS! WIN A HAWKE VANTAGE SPOTTING SCOPE RRP \$452!



AUSTRALIAN

July 2024
\$8.95 incl. GST

Shooter

THE MAGAZINE FOR SPORTING SHOOTERS



TRI-UMPHANT

**THREE-WAY COMBO
A CLASS ACT**

WIN A CHIAPPA LEVER ACTION .22!

PROMOTION BY TSA OUTDOORS. T&C APPLY. DETAILS ON PAGE 5



Benchrest Hall of Fame has a new member

The official publication of the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia
Proudly printed in Australia



ssaa.org.au

**iAIMING iA-612 GAMECHANGER
THERMAL SCOPE**



**SAVAGE IMPULSE PREDATOR
IN 6.5 CREEDMOOR**



TRIPLE TREAT

Kyle Andrews road tests a winning combination



SPARTAN JAVELIN LITE BIPOD

I had been looking forward to putting this trio through its paces for some time and my chance came on a large farming property in the far east of South Australia, comprising a mix of sandhills, remnant mallee scrub and low-lying cropping ground. The location provided the opportunity to hunt foxes, feral cats and a seemingly endless parade of rabbits during my two visits, as well as the space needed for the rifle to stretch its legs a little further.

The straight-pull bolt-action in 6.5 Creedmoor with thermal scope and bipod included in this well-balanced package from Nioa, all represented first-time experiences for me and each had quite a bit of hype to live up to.

Savage Impulse Predator

Three lots of ammo were provided in Remington Core-Lokt tipped 129-grain, Federal Premium 130gr Berger Match and Federal Varmint 95gr Hornady V-Max. Although I didn't shoot a series of targets with groups, suffice to say they all performed well and are capable of grouping inside 20mm at 100m depending on your skill level.

The Federal Premium actually produced an 11mm group at 100m courtesy of those Berger Match Projectiles. At 400m they maintained 0.75 MOA accuracy with the Core-Lokt not far behind, all in spite of a noteworthy crosswind and my deliberately

low-effort approach. In my opinion, accuracy is superior to requirements for a hunting rifle and it did this straight out the box, with no 'accurising' to speak of.

As expected from this calibre the ballistics are also impressive, making it ideal for hunting at night where distances are difficult to judge through a thermal scope's digital display. A 95gr varmint projectile shooting effectively flat out to 250m removes quite a bit of estimation in this instance. Having a one-piece Picatinny rail machined into the receiver with built-in 20 MOA offset, the Savage is also capable of the much longer range hunting or target shooting this calibre can support.

Initially the straight-pull bolt was stiff and required some force to operate. But with the application of some gun grease and as I fired more and more shots, it quickly started to become slick and lost the scratchiness of brand new kit. When closed, the straight-pull bolt is secured by ball bearings being forced outwards by internal springs which engage with the final push forward of the bolt handle.

Compared to the camming action of a traditional bolt rifle, I did find this mechanism difficult to load in silence and am certain I spooked at least one fox with the telltale sound of closing the action. It's perhaps more suited to remaining stationary and ready to fire with the safety catch engaged. On opening, a release at the rear

The full package, an extremely well-balanced combination.



A fox taken among wheat stubble near Parilla, SA.

of the bolt is pushed with the thumb and the handle itself will twist to the rear, both disengaging the mechanism and starting the rearward motion. It's a fast movement which quickly becomes second nature.

Having grown up shooting bolt-actions in competition which included rapid fire, I'm comfortable maintaining sight picture while working a bolt. I watched some YouTube videos to understand the appeal of the straight-pull setup, the key take-away being fast follow-up shots with the push-pull bolt motion not causing the rifle to deviate from target.

After around 100 shots I didn't feel the straight-pull significantly assisted in maintaining sight picture while reloading, primarily due to the spring pressure you must first overcome when twisting the bolt handle prior to pulling back. Yet it was certainly faster for follow-up shots and arguably, recoil makes the other issue of maintaining perfect sight picture a bit redundant in any case.

The stock sports a 'Mossy Oak' camouflage pattern and rubber inlays that really set off the look, though mostly add much-needed grip to the otherwise smooth surface of synthetic stocks. The AccuFit adjustable length-of-pull and comb height attachments were interesting to experiment with. Although there's no quick-release mechanism as I'd hoped, it's just a matter of a few screws to swap out the rubber pads

and completely change the feel of the rifle.

There's a good selection of thicknesses and lengths to achieve that customised feel from an off-the-shelf product, without paying thousands for an adjustable aluminium chassis. The 10-shot removable magazine fed smoothly throughout and is sturdy enough to be gripped as a handhold if that's your preference. It was also easy to insert in the dark without looking and gave a reassuring click when locked into place.

As a lefty in most pursuits other than shooting, the ambidextrous magazine release catch caught my attention, along with the ability to reverse the handle of the straight-pull bolt for left handers to use. You'd still need to deal with case ejection on the right, though that's a small price to pay compared to scant availability of genuine left-handed rifles.

Savage's Accu-Trigger has been out there for some time now and I used it on a Mark II .22LR about 10 years ago. Again, I found it easily adjustable and functioned safely at its lowest setting. This modern example is a little better with minimal creep, leaving a crisp pull at a satisfactorily light weight for a maker's standard hunting trigger. I was pleasantly surprised by this and wouldn't envisage the need to swap it for an after-market option.

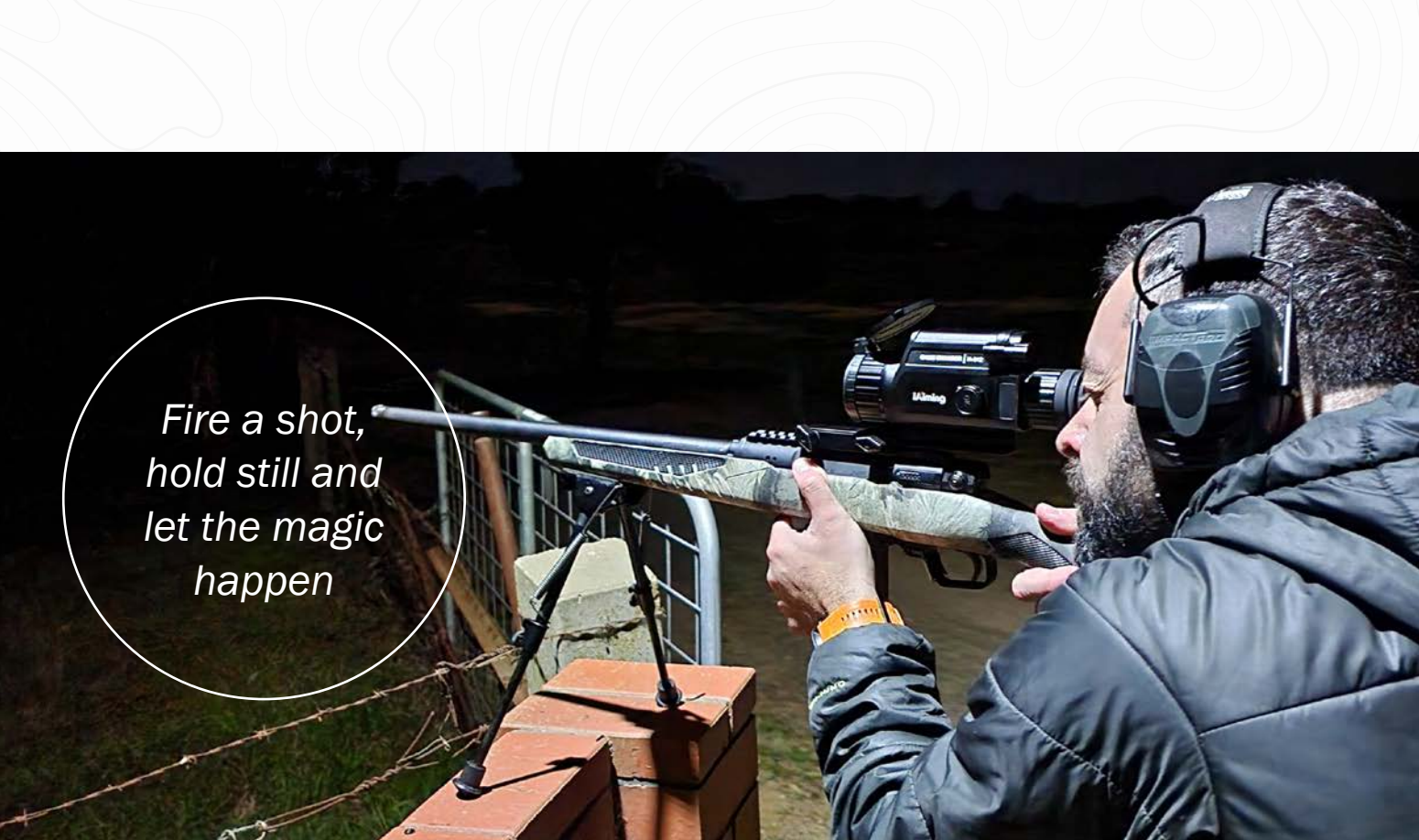
For interest's sake I fitted a 5-25x56mm scope designed for long-range shooting, achieving some impressive results with

factory hunting ammunition and very little effort. I had little prior knowledge of the 6.5 Creedmoor's ballistics and, given the hunting rifle platform, decided to test its capabilities with a rough and ready approach.

Locating a clear line of sight from my campsite to around 400m, I placed a 150mm square AR500 steel target with a large Corflute backing. I felt 400m would be the practical limit a hunting rifle would typically be expected to perform at (thermal scope or otherwise), and in keeping with the theme, made sight adjustments based only on bullet drop information on the ammo boxes.

Following a boresight and measurements after the first shot at 50m, I immediately stepped my way out on paper targets at 100m and 200m, finding the Savage continued to perform at the equivalent of 0.75 MOA or better with all types of ammunition. Bullet drops were essentially as stated on the boxes inside 200m and wind effects were minimal. At 400m I switched to Federal Premium with 130gr Berger Match Projectiles and made the necessary adjustments.

The 21km/h crosswind from 10 o'clock took its toll, as did the likely slower than advertised velocities from the Savage's shorter 20" barrel. With a sighter shot to inform correct holdover, my next four rounds produced a group on the steel target measuring roughly 80mm and I was impressed to say the least. With familiarity,



*Fire a shot,
hold still and
let the magic
happen*

Scanning for foxes in Kapunda.

more detailed testing and input of ballistics data to the iA-612 thermal scope, this rifle could easily be expected to meet the most demanding hunter's expectations.

Spartan Javelin Lite bipod

Spartan have named the fitting system Magnaswitch for the Javelin Lite bipod which has compatibility with a range of their products, allowing you to easily transfer equipment between rifles. The bipod can be fitted to allow either swivel rotation or be fixed by simply rotating it 180 degrees before inserting into the adaptor fitting. The fixed position is a little better for stability, however the free rotation/swivel of the rifle on the bipod is useful when scanning for targets. It also avoids the problem with fixed bipods where flexing the joints and legs will force it to pull back to its neutral position and affect point of aim.



Spartan Javelin Lite bipod with Magnaswitch attachment, tilt adjustment lever and rubber-capped tungsten-tipped feet.

A quick-release lever on the rear of the bipod also allows you to tilt the rifle to allow for uneven ground or slope of a vehicle bonnet, an important feature to help maintain true point of impact by eliminating rifle cant. Rubber caps on the feet provide an effective non-slip base which also protects things like bonnet paint, but can be removed to reveal tungsten carbide tips which lock into soil or a rocky base.

I'm a lover of bipods and rarely operate without one, yet when surrounding terrain is steep or decent rests such as tree branches or fenceposts are available, a bipod can quickly feel like dead weight. The Javelin Lite can be silently removed in those situations where its presence obstructs you from using an alternative rest, and is small enough to be put in your pocket with the weight barely noticeable. It's worth carrying even if you didn't plan on using it.

The only downside I found was the Javelin's low height when trying to shoot prone through a wheat stubble paddock. It simply wasn't tall enough in that situation. To be fair, this visibility issue is a common bipod problem and may mean the much taller Spartan Springbok bipod should be added to my wishlist, though the Javelin remains everything it's cracked up to be.

Gamechanger thermal scope

My first impressions of the iA-612 Gamechanger were its solid construction,

all-black anodised aluminium body and lack of the usual abundance of buttons which scopes in this category often have. It has a premium feel and the soft carry-case to store accessories is a nice touch.

The controls comprise a single scroll wheel with central push button on the left. This is combined with simple menu functionality, a single click for 'enter' or 'select', a long click for 'back' and scroll wheel to navigate options. It was easily operable in the dark with a single gloved hand while maintaining sight picture, though only if you have your left hand free, say when using the bipod or another secure rest. If holding the rifle standing unsupported to scan the horizon, it's quite difficult to use the scroll wheel for the digital zoom function, something I found irritating while hunting on foot, though it wasn't an issue in a vehicle or lying prone.

The beating heart of the unit, it's thermal sensor, has an impressive 640x512 resolution, allowing for excellent target identification of larger animals out to several hundred metres at least, with detection range out to 2km according to product specs. I managed to clearly spot a group of emus at 1.2km (estimated range on Google Maps) so the 2km claim is certainly not out of the question. In a little closer, targets such as feral cats could be clearly distinguished from a fox at 300m.

The iA-612 doesn't have an in-built laser rangefinder but does support a smart

Triple treat



Rabbits in the iA-612s sights.

bracketing method. The range-finding option in the menu allows you to adjust the spacing between two lines via the scroll wheel (bracketing the target), then the shooter inputs the approximate size of the target. It then calculates distance and adjusts the reticle position based on ballistics information and that distance.

The offset Picatinny rail mount allows for correct positioning of the sight to match the required eye relief, and is secured with thumb screws large enough to easily tighten the mount to the rail without tools. Ordinarily tools wouldn't be a concern, but with the iA-612's one-shot auto sight-in a true gamechanger, this scope can easily be swapped between rifle platforms at short notice. I took full advantage with it on a .17 HMR bolt-action and .357 Magnum lever-action where it performed superbly.

Nioa have an excellent video on their website demonstrating one-shot auto sight-in and I admit I was doubtful at the start. But I'm now converted and, in reality, achieved the same result multiple times. Select 'auto sight-in' from the menu, confirm the initial 25m distance, fire a shot, hold still and let the magic happen via the iA-612's software. It will sense the difference from the impact's heat detection and your point of impact, allowing necessary adjustments to be made automatically.

To take full advantage of the in-built ballistics software, you'll also need to select the distance of your follow-up shot for the iA-612 to be most precise (quick to do). There are pre-set ballistics for popular calibres and projectile weights, or you can enter customised data for reloads. On multiple occasions I put this to the test and found it to work reliably first time.

On picking up the package and fitting the iA-612, I selected 6.5 Creedmoor 95gr projectile pre-sets matching the supplied Federal Varmint ammo. I then fired the requested one shot at 25m, allowed the unit to make its adjustments and powered off. That evening I set off on foot hunting foxes on a farm near Kapunda in SA, and while I was forced to settle for a few rabbits that night, my very next shot at roughly 140m was a direct hit.

There's the option for manual zeroing to improve on this system and, if the scope was to be left on a single rifle, I'd make the effort to fine tune at specific distances depending on the target animal. After some experimentation, I recommend the use of reflective aluminium foil tape (used for patching insulation) cut into a crosshair shape for a precise aimpoint to make the adjustments, as traditional printed targets won't appear in the sight.

The focus ring at the sensor end of the iA-612 is much too stiff for my liking and you'll need a very steady rest to make fine adjustments. I've seen aftermarket throw levers which assist with this. Graduation marks on the ring for various distances would also be nice to have, though the device isn't particularly focus-sensitive either, so constant adjustments in the field just aren't required. In contrast to some night vision optics I've tried, which are perpetually out of focus, the iA-612's setting was forgiving and 'set and forget' for the most part.

The unit also supports the ability to see a live feed and record pictures or video through a mobile device app, a great addition which allows hunting buddies to watch remotely from a vehicle and assist with spotting targets. However, I did find that audio in both live view and recordings wouldn't synchronise to the video, with a delay of one or two seconds and I couldn't find a fix for this in the app. Basic video editing software would do the trick though.

Battery life is excellent compared to another thermal scope being used by a fellow hunter during testing. The iA-612 is advertised as eight hours and while I didn't test that fully, it was easily able to run for five with constant use. It lasted the night's hunt with plenty to spare, even after running the wi-fi feed for much of that time. The pair of rechargeable 18650 batteries supplied, each with 3400mAh capacity, are easily removed for recharge through a USB cable, so spares wouldn't be needed on a normal night's use.

As with all thermal scopes the iA-612 was a little less effective on warm evenings until trees, leaves, rocks and other features of the landscape had cooled sufficiently to improve contrast from the warm bodies of the critters I was after. I also had the chance to test on a misty night with some drizzly rain and, as expected, this limited effective thermal range.

Yet it's important to point out it was still superior to my companion's LED spotlight and telescopic sight combination, which was suffering due to reflection and glare from the rain. Even in those tough conditions, the take home message is if there are targets out there you'll definitely see them and I'm confident the Savage Predator rifle will definitely be able to hit them. The rest is up to you. ●

WOODS NOBO T-HAWK

Build a Nice Log Cabin Fire.

BLADE 88mm LENGTH 486mm WEIGHT 0.72 kg
HANDLE Tennessee Hickory STEEL 1055 Carbon Steel

CRKT2732: RRP from \$139



JOIN THE
OSA CIRCLE



Find your local CRKT Stockist at:
www.osaaustralia.com.au



RESPECT
HUNT RESPONSIBLY

CRKT®
Confidence in Hand®

