

There's no denying he's a good Scout

Rifle: Ruger Gunsite Scout

Cartridge: .308 Winchester

Scope: Leupold VX-III 1.5-5x20

The Scout's first hog.



For the latest instalment in our favourite rifle/cartridge/scope series, **Mark van den Boogaart** outlines a project which became a labour of love

When asked to write about a favourite rifle I started with the sensible options, you know, 12-gauge and .22LR. Thing is, it was like I was trying to answer the question as would a knowledgeable gun writer and, for better or worse, that approach doesn't work for me. So I started again.

I have some really good rifles and shot-guns in calibres I prefer along with a great selection of optics but if it came down to choosing one, it would be the Scout, and by the Scout I mean my Ruger Gunsite Scout in .308 Win with a VX-III 1.5-5x20mm Leupold on top. So let's give my choice some context. I like hunting marginal country as it's terrain I feel comfortable with. Maybe it's the big sky, maybe the lack of people but whatever it is I feel very much at home.

I've hunted marginal country for years, it's where I started, and for much of my hunting journey I relied on a lever-action. As a leftie, bolt-action options for a scrub gun were limited and the short, punchy characteristics of a .30 calibre, combined with good follow-up shot capability, meant I have owned and carried a number of lever-actions.

That was until the Ruger Gunsite Scout came along. As soon as I saw the first left-hand variant of the Scout, I bought one and sold my Marlin. With a true left-hand action, laminated stock, in .308 Win with a clunky box magazine and short 18" stainless steel barrel, the Scout was a rifle I'd been looking for. Why? It held the inherent benefits of a lever-action without the inherent ballistic limitations.

Now while the .308 Win isn't the sexiest calibre, there isn't much it won't trouble in

Australia. Sure, it's not really suited to NT buffalo but is powerful medicine for deer, goats and pigs. Looking back, I never had high expectations for the Scout and saw it for what I thought it was, an also-ran to the customised rifles in the safe. To me it was a scrub gun, a knockabout and not really in the same league as my European deer rifle.

With Scout in hand the first order of business was range time and, in showing my age, I ran in the barrel. I know it's a thing of the past - it's not needed any more - so humour me because that's what I did. By the end of that first day at Belmont I'd learned a few things about the Scout - it barked like an angry dog and the muzzle was a little jumpy off the bench but it wasn't fussy about factory ammo and, most surprisingly, was remarkably accurate. It's worth mentioning the Scout has never been

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fed handloaded ammo as the idea was to be a workhorse, something that would function with whatever factory ammo was available and the Scout seemed happy with the diet.

By way of optics I chose a low-powered Leupold, an older VX-III in 1.5-5x20mm and a fine example of high-quality American-made glass. Being an older model with 25mm tube it also worked well with the factory rings supplied with the rifle, which saved a few dollars.

I'm no range shooter so as soon as I could I took the Scout hunting and over that weekend managed to take a number of goats with the rifle - and jam it. More accurately, the heavy box magazine moved a little while attempting a quick follow-up shot, which caused the rifle to jam. As I was used to the smooth action of my Tikka rifles I may have said some unkind things about the US-made Ruger but also decided to do something about it. To me, the problem was the metal box magazine and looking around for options I found a good aftermarket polymer magazine. I ended up buying both 5 and 10-shot magazines and have never looked back.

The goats fell in February and feeling a little bold I made the call that I wanted a deer, goat and pig in one calendar year with the Scout, meaning my special customised Tikka became a safe queen but hey, the things you do when you open your mouth without thinking. It took a couple of months but next to fall was a pig, a good short-legged angry boar. We followed him over a period of 36 hours and finally pinned him at a shallow scrape of a dam. Spotting him, he never made it past the lip of the dam wall - two from two for the Scout.

Both goat and pig had been taken at close range in scrubby country but my next target was deer and the place I usually hunted required some longer distance shooting, so it was back to the range. With some experimentation I found a factory load that worked well with the Scout and groups certainly became tighter, the bonus being it wasn't a premium brand and is readily available in most places.

Unfortunately, work got in the way and my planned deer hunt kept being pushed back, so much so I was fast running out of time to reach the Mary Valley. Luckily I had some knowledgeable connections and late in the year I was heading on a deer hunt. The weather didn't want to make things easy and just after dawn a storm blew in. I'd left home about 2.30am to make the drive but as we weren't going anywhere I did what any self-respecting hunter would do - took a nap. About an hour later I awoke to a strange day. While it was well past dawn the



Have gun, will travel!

air was still, the light dull and cloud cover didn't seem to be moving.

Heading out I wondered if the deer had shot through but, as luck would have it, they were out and about. It was as if their internal clocks had been upset by the storm as they were there in numbers and none too worried about the continuing rumble of thunder. Unlike the goat and pig I had to take a slightly longer shot and again to its credit the Scout carried the day - deer, goat and pig in one calendar year to the scrub gun.

From that first year of ownership I've

hunted a number of locations and species with the Scout, using it to great effect. In fact, about three years ago I purposely put it away for a while so I could hunt with the Tikka again. It still runs exclusively on factory ammo and functions with minimal attention though I've continued to experiment with the set-up. At one point I changed the Leupold to an Aimpoint Micro Red Dot and back again, bought a GPO scope in 3-9x42mm to try that and, you guessed it, switched back to the Leupold. It wasn't because the Aimpoint or GPO

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The latest version of the Scout - and a good chunk of bacon; Aiming up on a red deer; Scout with Swarovski scope. The finished product - maybe.

were inferior, it's just the low power set-up worked so well with the Scout, the quality, eye relief and compact design made, and continues to make sense - and provides a great handle.

I've never tried to *forward* or *scout* mount a scope on the rifle. Again, it's a personal choice but I'm not sold on the idea of a scope all the way up front on a rifle that might take the odd knock. I've changed slings a few times and for a while carried the Scout with a Safari but some time ago I fitted a black leather Dingo sling and have stuck with it. Another change was

to Cerakote the Scout. The finish is matte black and while the process has added another layer of protection and slicked up the action, I did it primarily for the looks to make the Scout a complete package.

What's next for the Scout? Maybe it's time to look at a different stock or at least a new recoil pad as the rifle uses a system of supplied spacers to help achieve the right length of pull on the stock. While it's a worthy effort by Ruger the pad itself is too spongy for my liking. So that's my choice, a short barrel Ruger roughie in plain vanilla .308 Win with an older Leupold scope I've

had for ages - a rifle which proves the old adage that something can be greater than the sum of its average parts.