



Using The ‘S’ Word

In New Zealand, suppressors are a normal, essential — and accepted — part of hunting and shooting gear. Why shouldn’t it be the same in the U.S.?

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The steep, green hill made for a lung-burning climb, but the huge antlers of the red stag we spotted made us march on without complaint. I was hunting with Glen Dene Hunting and Fishing on the South Island of New Zealand, and we had located a spectacular free-range stag. In fact, there were three mature stags hanging out together on the crest of a ridge, where they could watch the world below them.

Half an hour later I was belly crawling to the edge of the hill we had ascended, and I laid down my pack and rested my rifle on it. I carefully adjusted

the parallax on the riflescope and ranged the bull at just under 250 yards. The stag was lying in his bed and soaking up some mid-morning sun. I dialed the turret on my scope so my .308 Win. bullet would find its mark, then waited.

The stags were oblivious to our presence, so my hunting companion, Dick Dodds, whistled as loud as he could. The stags lifted their heads but didn’t budge. After several shrill whistles, the trio finally got to their feet and looked around. When the bull I was targeting came into the open, I settled the crosshairs on its shoulder and slowly squeezed the trigger.

I could hear the bullet smack the skin and shoulder blade on the stag, and watched its nose hit the ground as it started a downhill slide at a high rate of speed. The other stags weren't sure what was going on, but they didn't hang around long to try and find out. The reason I could hear the im-

pect of my bullet, and the reason the smaller stags stood around momentarily, was because there was no loud bang. The shot was audible, but it was far from loud. I watched the bullet in my scope until it disappeared where I had held my crosshair. That is the beauty of a suppressor.



The author's hunting rig, complete with suppressor, shooting sticks and binos.



The uninformed stateside public often associates suppressors with assassins or criminal elements. In New Zealand, they're associated with considerate hunters and shooters looking to protect their hearing and reduce noise pollution.

A Suppressed Opportunity

Suppressors are often associated with crime, as that's what many that are uneducated about guns are led to believe. If you were to ask a question on the game show Family Feud: "What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word silencer?" The number one answer would be a "hitman," followed by "mafia," and then maybe "criminal."

If there were a version of New Zealand Family Feud and the same question were asked, the answers would be: deer hunter, night hunting and considerate hunting partner.

The misconception in North America around suppressors, which are often called silencers, means shooters must put up with recoil and noise. There's also a cost to a portion of society that doesn't have or shoot firearms. Continual loud noise can be irritating if you aren't used to it, so just imagine a shooting range where suppressors were required. Would anyone complain about the shooting if they couldn't hear it?

Societal Views

Many North Americans see suppressors as evil. What possible good could they have? Only criminals would want to own one, right?

It's amazing how society can be convinced that something is evil. A firearm performs the same way, and has the same result, whether you hear the bang or not. If making a weapon quiet means it will always be used for no good, then where does that put bows and arrows?

In New Zealand, many hunters would find it inconsiderate to bring a firearm on a trip that wasn't suppressed. Nobody wants to carry hearing protection, and nobody wants to have his or her eardrums blown out. Kiwis are used to suppressing their guns and look at it as part of the original purchase, just like adding a scope, a sling and a recoil pad.

Most New Zealand hunters live on wild game, but few go meat hunting during daylight hours. Finding a young hind in a spotlight and shooting it in the head or neck is like going to the grocery store, and no meat

is wasted. There are ranches in New Zealand with full-time rabbit and hare hunters. With no predators, it's amazing how quickly rabbits and hares can reproduce. Without some control, the rabbit populations would eat sheep out of existence. Suppressed rifles are used daily as part of wildlife management and control.

There is such a cultural difference in accepting firearms and suppressors that it's noticeable. Arriving in New Zealand shortly after Easter, I learned of a unique community activity to celebrate the holiday. Easter Sunday is when the community goes on a "bunny hunt," and with an exceptional participant turnout, there were close to 35,000 animals shot. I asked if there was a mistake and if it was instead 3,500, but I was quickly informed that a ridiculous amount of ammunition was indeed used up. Owning firearms and suppressors is the norm.

Suppressor Advantages

Suppressors come with varying degrees of noise reduction. They are priced differently, and just because a rifle is suppressed, does not mean it is silent. The noise is reduced to a point where it isn't harmful to one's hearing, but it's still distinctly audible.

When I arrived in New Zealand, I went to a local sports shop with my outfitter, and we purchased a brand-new Savage Model 16 in .308 Win. My experience is that they shoot extremely well out of the box. I set it up with a new Bushnell Elite Long-Range Shooting System scope and was ready to take it out of the store. My outfitter stopped me and told me we'd be putting a suppressor on it, and we did.

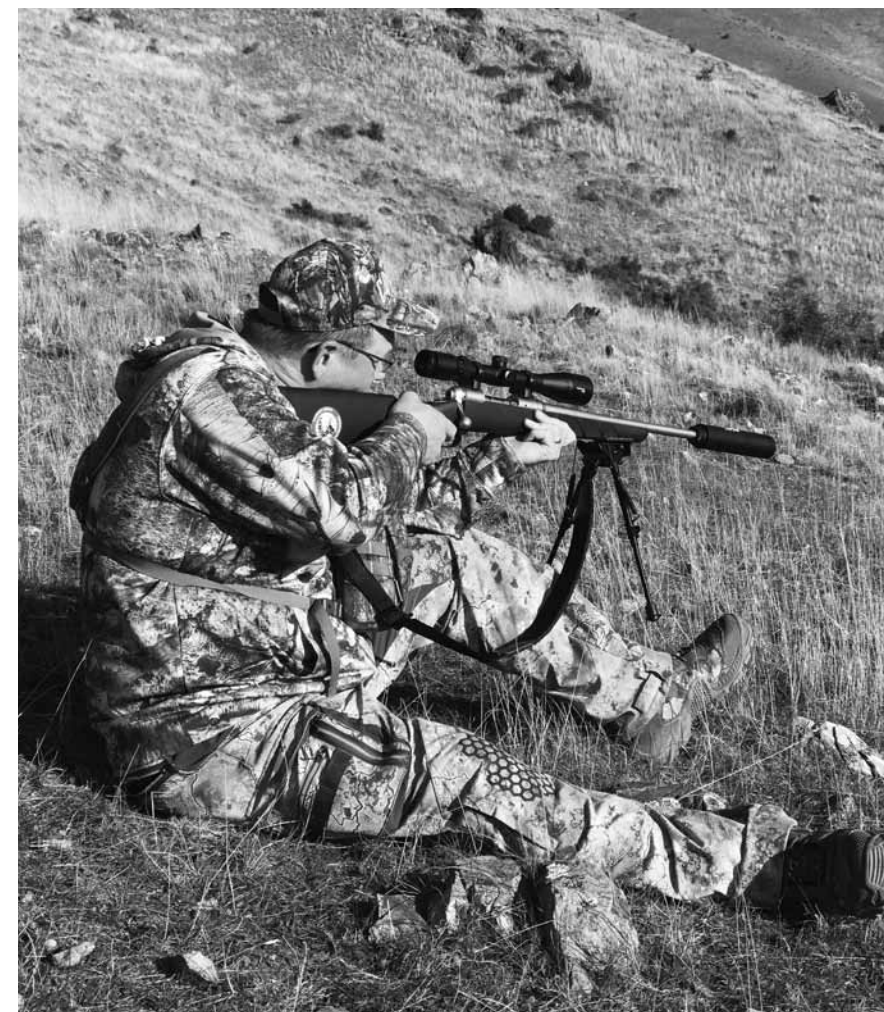
I went to the range to sight my rifle and shot off the bench without hearing protection. I could clearly hear my guide and hunting companions talking and informing me of where each bullet hit as they watched through a spotting scope. I was elated with the situation, but couldn't help but bemoan the basic attitudes and laws back in North America.

Bullet Travel

Using the suppressor on several hunts, I was amazed to see the vapor trail off



Purchasing a suppressor and adding it to a hunting rig in New Zealand took 3 hours and cost the author only \$300 NZ — which is about 40 percent less in U.S. dollars.



One of the key advantages of using a suppressor, aside from noise reduction, is that it reduces felt recoil. This means you can actually visually follow your bullet's trajectory to the target in many cases, which is helpful at the range and especially while hunting.



A suppressor does add weight to your rig. A bipod helps balance out the extra weight and makes for a more stable shot at the range and in the field.

the bullet, and often see the sun catch the back of the projectile. The reason I could see the detail was because the recoil had been greatly reduced, allowing me to see the bullet trajectory clearly through the riflescope.

Recoil Reduction

Suppressors do make a rifle quiet, but they also do so much more. The reduced recoil is significant. Shooting targets or animals and seeing a bullet's trajectory through your scope helps reduce shooter error and allows you to see everything from wind drift to pulled shots.

Noise Reduction

A bonus is that a suppressor does not change ballistics or performance of a firearm or cartridge. I didn't test the performance, but I was assured by gunsmiths and fellow hunters that I wouldn't find any difference in performance.

Teaching Aid

Suppressors are used in New Zealand to introduce new shooters to the sport and to train them with proper form. There are no worries about recoil and developing a flinch. Even with larger-caliber rifles, small-framed shooters

and those without much experience do extremely well on the trigger.

The Cost

I set up my rifle with a suppressor in New Zealand for a cost of about \$300 NZ. Of course, the U.S. dollar is much stronger than that of New Zealand, so the cost in North American terms would be about 40 percent less.

Preparation

I purchased the suppressor in a New Zealand hunting and fishing outlet, and they called a gunsmith down the street to see if the barrel could be threaded. The rifle was taken right over to hit the lathe and was ready to take to the range 3 hours after the purchase was made. The end of the rifle is threaded to screw the suppressor in place. If you want to use the rifle in its original form, you simply remove the suppressor and screw on a protective cap, which is barely visible when turned onto the threads.

Range Management

With concerns in the modern world around noise pollution and the distance at which shooting can be heard around ranges, it's surprising we don't see public requests for suppressor-only ranges. People could shoot in safe environments without having the neighbors hear them. It's a novel idea, but one that certainly holds merit. If only we could educate the public and quash the misnomers regarding suppressors.

Disadvantages: Weight

Suppressors do add weight to a firearm and make them barrel-heavy and unbalanced. There are few Kiwis that have suppressors on rifles without bipods. Having the front legs on the forearm of your rifle takes away the balance concerns. Most carry the suppressor in a pack and attach it to the firearm just before setting up to shoot. Removing the unit makes the rifle easier to carry when hiking or traveling. Taking the suppressor off after each use also prevents damage if the firearm is dropped or hit against a solid surface. **GDTM**