

It is always a pleasure to arrive back at the ute. Despite conditions that were wet to say the least and going places that were steep I did not slip up once. Nice one Lowa



Lowa Catalan Flex GTX

review

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Lowa boots have been available in New Zealand for some years now and they are generally regarded as one of the top performing brands

Many of you will be familiar with their Ranger II GTX and Tibet GTX models.

These two boots are well proven and cover many applications for both general hunting and high country use. There is still a niche open for a good quality lightweight boot for bush hunting and lower country use.

In many ways, finding a boot that will deliver on flexibility, quietness and weight, while still giving good ankle support and stability is perhaps a boot maker's biggest challenge. Many of the

more flexible soled, lightweight boots, while nice and quiet, fail the test when it comes to lasting long under hard use, giving good joint support and encouraging correct posture when carrying loads. Life is always a bit of a compromise but I for one would always be happy to sacrifice a bit of stealth in favour of good support.

The Catalan is a new offering from Lowa and targets the lighter weight hiking, trekking and stalking part of the market. The brochure states that this boot 'incorporates Lowa's new proprietary 'Flex' technology



Vibram AppTrail outersole on the Catalan



FLEX LACING



that reduces forefoot pressures and enhances heel fit for unbelievable walking comfort'. What 'Flex fit' does is to give a more natural forward ankle flex and heel fit.

Many of the features found on the Catalan are the same as those found on the Ranger, such as the medium flex stabiliser, lacing system and pronation and supination support system. The outer part of the boot is a mix of Nubuck leather and Cordura with a protective rubber rand at the heel and toe. All of this is helped by a Gore-Tex waterproof and breathable inner lining. The sole is a Vibram 'Aptrail' that has a wide spaced tread and a good heel.

Most of my hunting is in the North Island these days; a combination of farm, forest, bush and tops. When Greg sent me these boots to review, my first impression was that they may well be suitable for the lot. I have often had trouble with fitting some boots. In order to get enough length for my foot, I often end up with a size that allows for some heel slip. With the Catalans, there was no such trouble. I had simply given Greg my boot size (44) and when the boots arrived, I put them on and have had no problem since. This is not a common occurrence for me and I am still enjoying the simplicity of this 'fitting session'.

The boots fitted perfectly from day one. I decided to play it safe and wore

them about the office for the first week. They proved so comfortable that I had no concerns in taking them straight out from there for a full day on the hill. Day one was on a regular pig hunt and I headed bush to hunt the native/scrub country of the eastern Wairarapa. An hour into my hunt, the dogs tracked down a steep face and hit a nice 100 lb sow well below me. My three bailers decided on this day to be holders, so my usual casual trot to a bail became a downhill charge to get there as quickly as possible.

The footing was greasy after a night of rain but at no point did I have any traction issues with the Catalans.

The good heel and reasonably aggressive tread pattern saw to that. I dropped into a steep little creek and quickly dealt with the pig. After a rest, I put the insides on the outside and loaded up the pig. Looking back up the steep, greasy face I decided that I would much rather flounder my way down the gorge. This I did and although it was no picnic, I was impressed at the support offered by the new boots.

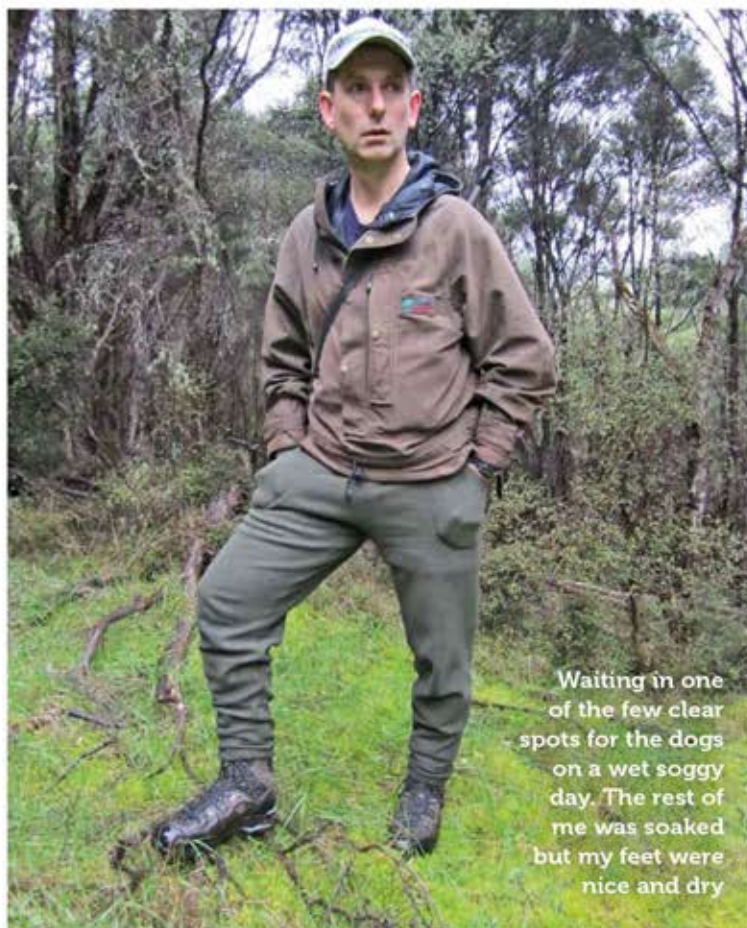
The other interesting thing was that I did not slip on the greasy rocks as much as I normally would with my usual boots. I was impressed - charging downhill after pigs and then carrying unstable loads in awkward places had shown up no issues at all.

Further hunts have not changed my initial impression. There are several other things that I have noticed. The first is that even after hunting all day in wet swampy conditions up to the tops of my boots, my feet have remained dry. The Cordura outer and Gore-Tex lining work well and do not appear to be any less waterproof than full leather. The Cordura is also not as heavy as leather when it's wet. A tick there for Lowa.

The other thing I've noticed after a few days in steep country is that these boots are certainly more flexible than others I have worn, but they still give good support when sidling. I would say that they give only slightly less ankle support than boots the next stage up the line, but I haven't felt like I needed more yet. In fact I may be imagining it, but the greater flex seems to allow me to grip the ground better by ensuring that all the sole is on the ground at all times.

The lacing system is definitely one of the best I have seen. The 'X' system on the tongue stops the laces coming loose over time and the lower eyelets are cleverly vented to help dirt clear itself. I was able to crank the laces up tight to give greater ankle support without cutting off the blood supply to my shins or causing discomfort. The boots have been wet for about a month now with a couple of full dryings in between and the rubber toe and heel rand looks as stuck to the rest of the boot as it did the day I took them out of the box. These boots are pretty light at 1500g. The Ranger IIs weigh 1640g. Price-wise they are a bit lighter as well, retailing at around the \$500 mark. You have to like that.

So all in all, I like these boots. We will have to wait and see if the extra stitching this dual material construction requires will handle serious wear and tear, but so far they look fine. To be frank, there was nothing I could really find that I didn't like. Even though there is a greater level of flex, my heels were securely locked in and there was no heel slip at all. **If you are looking for a general purpose, lighter weight boot that will still deliver on the bigger days in bigger country, then I would suggest you take a look at the Catalans.**



Waiting in one of the few clear spots for the dogs on a wet soggy day. The rest of me was soaked but my feet were nice and dry