

A Look At One Of The Fastest-Growing Equine Sports In The Country - Cowboy Mounted Shooting



Cowboy Mounted Shooting is a family-friendly equine discipline where mounted contestants compete in a fast-action timed event using two .45 caliber single action revolvers, each loaded with five rounds of specially prepared black powder blanks. The sport has a variety of levels of competition for everyone, ranging from children riding the patterns without revolvers to novice levels to the seasoned professional.

Contestants are required to dress in traditional western style or in the old time style of the late 1800's. Traditional style includes a long sleeve western shirt, 5 pocket blue jeans covered by chinks or chaps, western boots, and a cowboy hat (or helmet). Those who prefer to try and look as authentic to the period as possible may be seen wearing shirts without collars and high-waisted pants with buttons, not zippers, and an old style cowboy hat. Women may also wear long skirts, dresses, or "split skirts" similar to the ones worn by the

famous American Sharpshooter of the late 1800's, Annie Oakley.

While the majority of horses used are Quarter Horses, riders can use any horse or mule. Morgans, Paso Finos, Arabians, Tennessee Walking Horses, grade horses and others can be seen participating. Some horses take to the sport easily, while others require extensive training to get used to shooting, turning, and going fast.

There's a lot going on in mounted shooting! Not only are there over 80 different patterns involving great horsemanship in maneuvering and following a set course, in addition, riders are using single action revolvers which means the gun must be cocked each time before firing by drawing the hammer back. While you may not even be able to see them doing it, riders are not simply pointing and shooting, they are pulling the hammer back and then the trigger every time at each of the ten targets during their "run". You also may not catch riders changing guns! They shoot the first five balloon targets with one revolver and then they must holster it and draw the second revolver to finish the course.

As if that wasn't enough there are even classes for Rifle, Shotgun and Cavalry riders! Contestants in the Rifle class will shoot the first five targets with their revolver, holster it, and then shoot the last five targets with single action rifles! Rifles require the rider to use both hands so they drop the reins and guide the horse with their legs as they gallop along and shoot the last five targets! Similarly, Shotgun class riders use the revolver for the first five targets, drop the reins, and then pull out their shotgun and shoot a cluster of three balloons on a special holder and then further down, another cluster with two balloons. Cavalry riders are challenged by riding in a 1800's style saddle, a McClellan, and also have to use a different type of holster with a flap draped over the horn of the saddle and hung low. The Cavalry class takes you back in time as riders sport Confederate and Union uniforms or dress like unsung heroes of the war, nurses of the Red Cross.

Safety is paramount in this sport. Live rounds are strictly prohibited at competitions and certified blanks must be used. The cartridges fired are called .45 caliber Long Colts. The brass cartridge is loaded with black powder like that used in the 1800's



and end of the cartridge is crimped. When fired, the resulting sparks will break a balloon up to about 15 feet. Riders must load and unload in a specified area attached to the arena and are not allowed to have guns loaded with any kind of ammunition outside of that area. Violators to this rule are issued a 60-second penalty. While these blank rounds will not kill a person, they can certainly burn and cause damage to the rider, horse or by-standers which is why safety is very important!

Safety in horse training and firearm handling is emphasized at all times. Many clubs sponsor clinics to assist new shooters in starting their horses and learn the basics of safe firearm handling. Range masters are in the arena at all times during competitions to insure safe riding and shooting are exercised. New shooters are usually required to demonstrate that they have achieved minimum acceptable levels of riding and shooting skills.

Cowboy Mounted Shooting is a family-friendly sport! Contestants include moms, dads, kids, grandparents and grandkids! The riders in the Wrangler class (ages 11 and under) ride the same pattern that the grown-ups do, but they may shoot Hollywood cap pistols, engaging each target as if they were shooting real blanks. As they advance in age and experience, they shoot the real McCoy (.45's with blanks) at balloons from the ground while standing stationary with mom or dad at their side. By the time a seasoned Wrangler ages out and enters the next level as a Men's or Ladies' Class Level 1 rider, they are quite experienced in the sport and many times advance quickly through the levels.

Adult divisions include Men's, Ladies', Senior (age 50 and up) Men's, and Senior Ladies' all of which have levels 1-6. All riders start as a "1" and advance based upon a specified number of qualified wins.

Riders are scored on time and accuracy. There is a 5 second penalty for each missed balloon, a 5 second penalty for dropping a gun, a 10 second penalty for not running the course correctly and a 60 second penalty for falling off the horse. Speed is important, however, accuracy is usually more important than speed. A typical pattern can be run in 15-35 seconds, so penalties can really hurt.

The camaraderie in the sport of Cowboy Mounted Shooting has been said to be like no other discipline! It is common to see competitors in the same class watching others run, cheering them on and encouraging them. It's also common for contestants to offer others their guns to borrow or even their horse to ride if a horse gets injured or throws a shoe! Many have said the reason they start and stick with the sport is the family atmosphere, not only "blood family", but becoming a part of a new "shooting family".

To learn more about this exciting family-friendly sport in Virginia or West Virginia, contact *George Lewis, Jr., club president of 1st Virginia CMSA at 540-631-5674* or visit the following websites:
www.1stvirginiacmsa.com or www.cmsaevents.com.

To learn more about the sport in Maryland, contact club president of the Mason Dixon Deputies, Rob Johnston at 410-783-0018 or email mddeputies@gmail.com.



Submitted by Lisa Perry Phillips

Senior Ladies Level 1 and addicted cowboy mounted shooter since 2014