

EDITORS PICK: BEST BREATHABLE CINCHES

Western SHOOTING HORSE

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PRESERVING A RARE BREED OF HORSE AND RIDER

ANDRA OLSON
Colt Supergirl

MOUNTED
ARCHERY
A NEW BEND
ON AN OLD SPORT

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Photo by Stephen R. Schlabach

ON THE COVER

By Sarah Sayles

ANDRA OLSON

Colt's Supergirl has a lot on her plate including a full season competition commitment, a traveling clinic, a thriving mounted shooting business as well as a hefty responsibility as Colt's mounted shooting spokesperson. With a commitment to haul the super-sized Colt horse trailer a guaranteed 60,000 miles this year, Olson performs a balancing act for family, business and the road ahead.

SUPERGIRL

While on a camping trip with friends, Andra and Dan Olson had no idea they were about to discover the sport that would launch Andra into a new career. Out of the blue, their guide Wes Walton announced he was taking them on a detour. That little side trip took them to a mounted shooting match in Piedmont, SD.

"It was the first time I saw the sport," Andra says. "I told my husband, 'I've gotta do that!'"

Right: Andra in competition; Below: Olson in Las Vegas during the World Series shoot.



All the way home to Minnesota, Andra could talk about nothing but shooting. She went back to Wes and bought a mare named Little Girl, and the pair began competing. In their first year, they qualified for the CMSA World Championships, then held in Scottsdale, AZ.

On her way to the Worlds, Andra took Little Girl to the Arizona State Championships for a practice shoot. While they were there, the mare got sick and ended up in the hospital. The vet believed she had contracted salmonella poisoning from contaminated water. Miles from home, alone and with a sick horse, Andra didn't think she could compete at Worlds.

"I learned something about these mounted shooting people," she says. "About how they support each other." Wes Walton mounted her on a horse called Ace and Andra went on to win her level and place third overall.

"To this day I love that horse," she says. "We made some kind of connection that weekend. I needed him both physically and mentally."

The sad news, however, was that her own mare could not be saved and Andra went home devastated. She told her husband, "I'm exhausted. I'm done."

New friends

Ironically, Jim Hanson saw his first mounted shooting competition at the very same shoot in Piedmont, SD, where Andra saw her first match. The two met during Andra's first year of competition. When he heard that Andra had lost her horse, Jim called Dan Olson. He told Dan he had two horses he thought would fit Andra and invited the couple to come by and take a look.

"He knew I had connected with that mare and had had some success," Andra says. Jim thought that getting Andra back in the saddle was the answer, but Dan told him that Andra didn't want to go on. Jim wouldn't take no for an answer.

As it happened, Dan and his father were on their way to Wes Walton's Lone Tree Bible Ranch (where they sit on the board of directors) and they decided to make a detour through South Dakota to look at the horses. When Dan got home, he had a surprise for Andra—he had bought both of the horses and had asked Jim to bring them out and work with Andra for a week.

The plan worked. "We went to a shoot or two and right away my love for shooting came back," Andra says.

Over the course of the next year, the Hanson and Olson families became fast

friends. Andra traveled to many of the matches with Jim because she didn't want to drive alone. On those trips they spent hours discussing the young sport and how it could be improved.

"We were writing everything down," Andra says. "We were trying things, we were in the arena dissecting everything through our experience."

In those early days there weren't any mounted shooting trainers. Shooters talked with each other and shared ideas, but there wasn't any formal training. Andra felt that a crucial element was missing from the sport.

"The sport was new and we knew what everyone was struggling over," she says. AJ Horses was born on the road between matches.

Taking the next step

The pair started doing clinics and training horses and people as a part of the new business. Because of her own experience with buying the horses from Jim, Andra was adamant that people had to come work with their horses as a part of the training process.

"The majority of the time problems (with the horse) come from the rider not doing what they're supposed to be doing," she says.

Between matches, clinics, and their own individual training programs as part of AJ Horses, about three years went by before the team thought about doing videos. The idea came out of the clinics.

"You come and you take lessons, you're just bombarded with information," Andra says. "You need something to look back on."

As the first video began to come together, Andra realized they would need some monetary support to cover the financial output. She had met General William M. Keys of Colt Firearms several times at Festival of the West

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Andra Olson at home in Minnesota for a winter respite.





Olson competes at the Lazy E in Guthrie, Oklahoma.

Lucinda Wood

Olson and partner Jim Hanson log over 60,000 miles each year with the Colt Horse trailer.



Lucinda Wood

and wondered if Colt might put an ad on that first video as a way to generate some funds. When she explained the importance of getting instructional videos to the mounted shooters, he liked the idea.

"We already had a great relationship with Colt and it has grown from there," Andra says. In time that relationship developed into a new avenue for Andra and AJ Horses.

"Colt and AJ Horses have trademarked their names together to promote the sport of mounted shooting," she says. "Our trailer is a traveling billboard that puts in 60,000 miles a year. They are a wonderful company to work for, very supportive, very generous with the sport."

The home team

Although Andra does not put in all 60,000 miles with the trailer each year, she still puts in a lot of air travel going to matches and trade shows. Her family has supported her every step of the way.

Dan Olson played football and baseball in college, so it was natural for him to push Andra to continue with mounted shooting after seeing her succeed so spectacularly in her first year.

"I think that's why--when Jim called--being a very driven athlete himself, Dan told me, 'Work harder! Dig harder!'" Andra says. He was right, and Andra went on to win multiple National Championships and three World titles on Pal, one of the two horses she originally bought from Jim.

Andra's children are also very athletic. Although they are natural riders and have done some shooting at home, neither has chosen to pursue mounted shooting. Michael, age 18, is in his first year of college where he plays football and baseball. Sixteen-year-old Allie plays several sports and is already focused on playing hockey in college.

"My children are very driven in their own sports," Andra says. Although they traveled with her some when they were little, today it's a balancing act to make sure everyone gets where they need to be when they need to be there.

"One miracle thing in the world is the cell phone," Andra says. "I can organize who's going to practice, who's picking up whom. Communication is good." In

addition, Andra limits herself to no more than 15 shoots a year. That allows her to be home when her family needs her.

"My house is very active," Andra says. "The other night I fed twenty-nine hockey players dinner. We are very much an open-door home--everyone's welcome."

On down the road

As her business grows, Andra challenges herself with new responsibilities. Her latest project with partner Jim Hanson? A book.

"Not everyone can have a trainer in their back pocket," she says. The book details exercises and drills from clinics, which will help students, remember what they worked on. Andra hopes it will also inspire other riders to find ways to improve their horsemanship and reduce boredom in their practice time. The book will be published in pamphlet form and should be available later this spring.

Her own personal goals keep her riding and shooting almost daily. She has high hopes for the horse she is riding now, but she is also aware that any good horse might find that perfect fit with another shooter. Although Andra works each year toward another World Championship, she is focused on having a good life and a happy family. 🐾

AJ Horses - A Shooting Enterprise

Stampede Clinics

AJ Horse tours the U.S. conducting mounted shooting clinics as part of the Colt/AJ Horses Stampede Tour.

Mounted Shooting Merchandise

AJ Horse produces merchandise specifically for the sport including horse ear protection; balloon pegs, stop/go light; balloon table.

Educational Videos

AJ Horse has produced a best-selling 4-DVD mounted shooting training collection.

Sponsorship Tour

Colt and AJ Horses sponsor CMSA, MSA, EXCA, Superhorse and the World Series of Mounted Shooting.