



# INTO THE SPORT

## Andra Olson

**Part Business,  
Part Pleasure,  
All Competition!**

Maybe there's something in the water of those 10,000 lakes. Maybe it's the cold winters that make folks a little tougher. Whatever it is, there are some excellent mounted shooters in the state of Minnesota.

*Photo by Mark Quigley*



Photo by John Beckett

*Andra spends her time between family, the sport and the business. It's a balancing act she has learned over the years.*

Clothing courtesy of Cruel Girl Jeans

**A**ndra Olson is at the top of that list. For most of the last decade, Andra has been a force in the sport. She has three CMSA World Championships under her belt, as well as numerous other top titles. Her 13-year-old palomino Pal is one of the winningest horses in the history of mounted shooting. She and partner Jim Hanson own AJ Horses, which seems to do a bit of everything—horse sales, training, clinics, videos, and more. They've developed earplugs for horses. She and Jim also came up with the idea for the stop-go light tower, which is featured at the starting line of most events. And they serve as official spokespersons for Colt Firearms.

Andra has a passion for mounted shooting. And she loves to talk about it (in contrast to her MN neighbor, the quiet Chad Little). So let's get out of the way and let Andra tell her story.

#### How She Got Into Mounted Shooting

My husband and I were actually on vacation visiting Wes Walton in Wyoming in '98. Wes was signed up to participate in a shoot, someplace in South Dakota—and he asked us to come along. So we went and we watched him and I was just intrigued by it. It just looked like so much fun. And then we went back to Wes' ranch and he said, "You've got to try it." So he set up a course and I tried it, and just had a ball. We

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J2 Photo Productions, John Beckett Photography and Julie Koeth Make-up/Styling

rode and shot all day long.

And then shortly after, we went back and met Wes at Deadwood, South Dakota, and he signed me up and I competed. I used one of his horses and used his guns and just had a blast. I did real well for my first shoot. It was amazing how addicted I was. And so I actually went back to Wes's and bought one of the horses that they had been shooting off of. I brought it home with me so I could just keep on competing. I was absolutely enjoying it, I couldn't get enough!

#### Her Horse Pal

I bought Pal in 2000 from Jim Hanson,

now my business partner in AJ Horses. Pal and I are a good team—I'm the excitable one and he's calm and patient. He's not necessarily the fastest horse out there, but Pal is one of the quickest and most efficient horses in the sport. He doesn't make mistakes. If there was a mistake, it was me; I lost focus. I let something distract me and take me out of my game.

#### Philosophy and Process of Competition

I compete for myself and my horse. Nothing else. I can't worry about the other competitors and what they're doing and how they're doing. I find that that's the best way to compete. It's a challenge for me to do the best that I can with my horse.

So I'll take the first stage of the day and just focus on it. I'll see how they've got it set up and I'll decide which way I'm going to go. I don't worry about how any of the other competitors are running it. I know my horse so well that I know which way he'll turn better, which rhythms are best, what lead will work better. I'll have it all figured out. I don't think, "Okay, go up there, turn left, do that." I just visualize my body, my horse moving in a rhythm.

To be a top competitor, you really have to know your horse that well and you have to know yourself that well, to know which way you're going to run a pattern and figure out what's going to be the best for the two of you as a team. So when I get into the arena, I know exactly what I'm going to do, and I just have to let it happen. The minute I think about something when I'm out there, something goes wrong.

#### How AJ Horses Was Started

Jim started shooting at about the same time as I did, although he'd been working with horses all of his life; he was born and raised on a ranch and used horses daily.

After purchasing Pal from Jim, we got to visiting about the sport, and what a wonderful sport it is—the horsemanship, how the horse is utilized, the precision that's there. And we got to talking about how there wasn't much available for the shooters because the sport was so new. There weren't any trainers or clinicians to help people. So we took a year and a half of discussing and developing AJ Horses as far as what was out there, what wasn't out there, what people needed. So in 2001, we initially started with training and clinics. And it just grew from there.

#### On Family

I'm the only one in my family that competes in mounted shooting. My husband and kids are all very athletic but are in-

involved in other sports. I'm just the only mounted shooter. So when I'm not doing something related to AJ Horses, I'm usually at one of their events. I love watching them. We're definitely into our sports. But AJ Horses is truly a family business. Everyone from both families, Jim's family and mine, we all participate in the business. The earplugs are manufactured out of here. The balloon trays, the balloon pegs, they're all manufactured right out of our facilities.

#### How the Sport Has Changed in 10 Years

It's amazing how much this sport has changed. The quality of horses and level of riding has improved drastically. The professionalism is really starting to show in this sport. Its gotten to the level where

people are realizing to be competitive they need to ride a better trained horse, and to put the time into improving their own skills. Any more, at the big events, you or your horse can't make a mistake, and you can't miss a target and hope to win. There are so many good competitors and good horses out there, that you can't make up for any mistakes.

#### Advice

Enjoy yourself. Enjoy what you're doing. Enjoy that you're capable of doing it.

#### Long-term Goal

Is to stay healthy and continue doing the things I love with passion.



Photo by John Beckett