

8 BEST SHOOTING HORSE TRAINERS

By Ken Amorosano and Mark Boardman

If you think about all of the Western equine sports—barrel racing, reining and cutting—these horses have very specific duties. They are very talented at what they do. A mounted shooting horse is required to do all this and more, including running different patterns each and every run. Add to that the noise and flash of gunfire and up to three days of competitions running as many as 10 or more stages, and today's mounted shooting horse is the ultimate performance equine.

So Cowboy Mounted Shooting puts a premium on having a specially trained horse to do the job and do it right.

The first part of the process is finding an animal with the potential for greatness. There are just some horses that will never make a good prospect and there are some that are naturals right from the start. It takes a trained eye to evaluate good prospects and turn them into quality shooting horses.

Over the years, shooting horse trainers have emerged from all parts of the country, finding and producing these specialized competitors who must be consistent, immune to gunfire and extremely athletic. Western Shooting Horse did our best to identify the top trainers in the sport and boiled it down to a handful and a half. Here is our pick of the 8 Best Shooting Horse Trainers.

AJ Horses Monticello, Minnesota

Andra Olson and Jim Hanson—the AJ of AJ Horses—have a simple philosophy when it comes to working with equines: “We don’t break them,” explains Andra. “We don’t force them or manhandle them. We train the horse to work with us.”

It’s an approach that’s been very successful over the years.

And over that time, they’ve come up with a training process. They start with animals that are at least four years old. And then, according to Jim, they look for traits that make a good mounted shooting horse: “We know about their training before. They’re athletic. They’ve got a strong mind. And there’s a look in their eye, and you can see their mannerisms when you or somebody else is handling them.”

When the horses arrive—nothing. “The first two weeks, the horse is just around. We don’t ride them. We don’t train them. We don’t do anything,” says Andra. “So that horse gets to see us, smell us, watch us, and get comfortable with us. And we observe them.”

Andra Olson and Jim Hanson,
AJ Horses



Photo by AJ Horses

Part of the AJ advantage—two trainers. Some horses respond better to Jim, others to Andra.

Then they’re given all-around training—trail riding, barrels, roping. Only then do Andra and Jim fine-tune the animals for mounted shooting. Andra

says, “We first get them used to the balloons. We get them used to cones and patterns. That’s even before we expose them to guns and gunfire.”

And when the training is done—a top mounted shooting horse.

www.ajhorses.com



Photo by Lucinda Wood

Jimmie Allen Spokane, Missouri

For Jimmie Allen, It all started in 1998. Dan Plaster called: “I’ve seen this mounted shooting. I need a horse that you can run patterns on and shoot balloons.” Allen told him he had one that was broke enough to do something like that. They worked on the animal and voila! They had a mounted shooting horse.

Since then, Jimmie has become an acknowledged leader in the field. So much so that folks bring him many prospects each year.

So what does he look for in a top shooting horse? “Number one, I like a horse with a good mind. A horse that will come to you out in the pasture.”

When it comes to training, Jimmie does a lot of work outside the arena—and a lot of things other than shooting. He says, “I rope on them a lot. I run barrels on them. I gather cattle, trail ride. If the horse has the same job every day, pretty soon he is not going to like his job.” At the end of training, Jimmie expects a nice, calm horse.

Then he matches them with riders. “I like for people to come to my house and ride them for a day or a week or a month,” he explains. “That way they can know the horse and more importantly the horse knows the rider.”

The bottom line for Jimmie Allen: If you will watch a horse and pay attention, he will let you know everything you need to know.

www.allenranchhorses.com