



Gun Introduction Progression

Building Confidence Without Compromising the Horse

Why This Matters

Gun work is one of the defining elements of the Shooting Horse discipline, but it is also one of the easiest places to create long-term problems if the foundation is not ready.

When introduced correctly, gun work builds stability and trust under pressure. When introduced incorrectly, it can damage confidence, blur communication, and set the horse back in a way that is hard to undo.

Before You Start

Your horse must already have cadence, confidence, and control before you begin. If the horse can't maintain rhythm, stay mentally with you, and respond clearly to the aids, you are probably not ready for gun work yet.

Do not use gun work to identify foundation problems. ***Build the foundation first.***

Step 1 — Foundation

Before introducing sound, make sure the horse is calm and consistent under saddle. This is your baseline.

- Consistent rhythm at all gaits
- Clear responses to the aids
- Calm mental connection to the rider

Step 2 — Introduce Sound

Begin in a controlled environment and introduce sound gradually. The horse should stay focused on the rider, not fixate on the sound.

- Keep the horse moving forward
- Watch for any change in cadence
- If tension appears, step back immediately

Step 3 — Build Exposure

Increase intensity gradually and deliberately. Never add more than the horse can process calmly.

- Maintain the same expectations as normal riding
- Only progress when confidence stays intact
- Do not overwhelm the horse and call it progress

Step 4 — Integrate

Once sound is no longer changing the horse's mind, integrate it into normal riding while protecting all Four C's.

- Cadence stays steady
- Confidence remains intact
- Control stays light and clear

What Not To Do

Do not rush steps. Do not ignore tension. Do not push through fear and hope the horse will “get over it.” Those choices create bigger problems later.

Reset Rule

If something breaks, go back to cadence. Rhythm is your reset point and your best indicator of whether leadership is still intact.