

The Competitive **SHOOTING** **HORSE**

Building Trust,
Balance
& Precision
for Competition



A Shooting Horse Training Manual



Shooting Horse Foundation Training Manual

Public Preview • 2026

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This Public Preview may be shared freely in its original form. The full manual (complete chapters, progressions, and training resources) is included with NaSHA membership and Shooting Horse School registration.

This manual is educational in nature and is not a substitute for hands-on instruction from a qualified professional. Horses and firearms involve risk. Always prioritize safety, use appropriate equipment, and seek experienced help when needed.

Full manual access and resources: shootinghorse.com

Dedication

This one's for the horse.

For the animal that carries us, forgives us, and keeps trying—sometimes long after we've made it hard.

And it's for the people who have shared what they know freely... the ones who remember that the horse is the point, and that the sport only grows when we help each other.

This manual is a living document, and we welcome feedback from anyone who wants to improve it for the good of the horse.

Where to Start

A quick guide to help you start where your horse is today — not where you wish they were.

Start Here

- If your horse cannot lope calmly, steer willingly, and soften to pressure → start with Chapter 2 foundation riding.
- If your horse is broke to ride but reactive to new noise or pressure → start with Chapter 2, then move into Chapter 4.
- If your horse is solid under saddle but has never been introduced to gunfire → begin at Chapter 2, then Chapter 3
- If your horse is gun-broke but becomes chargey or anxious in patterns → start with Chapter 4, then return to Chapter 3.

Two Rules

- Don't skip steps. The horse always tells you what chapter you're in.
- When you hit resistance, don't take it personal — take it seriously. Resistance is information.

About This Method

A famous horseman once told a fellow shooter that for our discipline to grow, the horsemanship behind it has to improve. We don't claim that role for ourselves, nor do we pretend to measure up to the best horsemen in the sport.

What we do have is a method shaped by decades of hands-on experience, guided by skilled horsemen, and proven across many horses and settings.

This manual is not proprietary, nor does it claim exclusive knowledge. It simply documents how we start and develop shooting horses, based on more than two and a half decades of work and the experience of starting hundreds of horses in both private and clinic environments.

For much of the sport's history, there has been no widely shared roadmap for making a shooting horse. Knowledge has largely been passed person to person, which has led to inconsistency despite many good contributions. We chose to bring structure to that process by writing down what has been taught to us. Horses expose unclear thinking faster than any written explanation ever could.

Our confidence in this approach comes from results, from the horsemen who taught us, and from cavalry standards and foundational horsemanship principles. We are not claiming this is the only way. Use what helps, ignore what doesn't, and apply sound judgment as we work to move the sport forward — for the good of the horse.

Travis & Laura Smith
CMSA #3031 & #3032

The Four C's of Shooting Horse Development

If you protect & develop these, your horse stays with you — and the sport gets better along the way.

Cadence — A steady rhythm that stays consistent through pressure. Whatever cadence you start a pattern at is the cadence you should finish with.

Confidence — The horse stays mentally with the rider instead of reacting to the environment. Built through clarity, consistency, and fair leadership.

Collection — Balanced movement that allows turns, rate, and stops without falling on the forehand. Protects soundness and keeps the horse adjustable.

Control — The horse responds to the rider's cues reliably — even when excited or unsure. Control is calm, not forceful.

Appendix A: Weekly Practice Template (3 Rides/Week)

Goal: Build Cadence, Confidence, Collection, and Control without rushing your horse.

Ride 1 — Cadence + Control

Focus: rhythm, steering, responsiveness

- Warm-up at walk/trot until relaxed
- Lope circles both directions (same cadence start to finish)
- Transitions: lope → trot → lope (no rushing)
- Redirect drill: move shoulders/hips when distracted
- End with calm lope circle + soft stop

Optional: ☐ Introduce light gun exposure or simulated cue work (no pressure)

Notes: _____

Ride 2 — Confidence + Pressure Tolerance

Focus: staying mentally with the rider when things change

- Warm-up calm and forward
- Start/stop practice: smooth stops without tension
- Lope circles; add small changes (speed, direction, position)
- If using gunfire: only after relaxation and forward movement
- Never end on a bad reaction — finish on a manageable win

Optional: ☐ Balloons exist in the space (ride your horse, ignore objects)

Notes: _____

Ride 3 — Pattern Skills

Focus: pattern pieces, not full speed

- Warm-up with lope circles on the lead of the first turn
- Ride pattern without the rundown (unless horse stays relaxed)
- Break pattern into sections: turns, lead management, rate points
- End on last lead; circle and gradually downshift
- Finish calm — horse ends more confident than they started

Optional: ☐ Call the line out loud while riding

Notes: _____

Weekly Check (circle one):

Cadence ☐ Improving ☐ Same ☐ Struggling

Confidence ☐ Improving ☐ Same ☐ Struggling

Collection ☐ Improving ☐ Same ☐ Struggling

Control ☐ Improving ☐ Same ☐ Struggling

Next week's focus: _____

Table of Contents (partial)

Chapter 1 – The Foundation – Leadership, Trust & Readiness.....	14
The War Horse Mindset	15
Leadership Over Force	16
The Trust Account	17
Recognizing Resistance	18
Our Responsibility.....	19
Readiness Comes First	20
Rider Readiness.....	20-21
Horse Readiness.....	22
Cadence	22
Focus and Redirection	23
Confidence Before Complexity	24
Chapter 2 - Skills for the Shooting Horse.....	26
Responding to Resistance	27
The Role of the Aids.....	27
Neutral Leadership	28
Forward Confidence	29
The Lope.....	30
Steering and Line Control	31
Collection Without Brace	32
One Handed Riding	33
Transitions and Adjustability.....	34
Common Riding Issues	35
Readiness Markers to Move On.....	36
Chapter 3 -Guns, Noise Exposure, and the Calvary Method	40
Gun Breaking Setup & Safety	41

Hearing Protection	42
How Horses Experience Sound	43
Zones of Fire	44
Rider Competence with the Firearm	45
The Cavalry Method	46
Gun Breaking	46-48
The Rule	49
Chapter 4 -Balloons & Patterns	52
Introducing Balloons	52-53
Early Balloon Exposure	54
Patterns Around Balloons	54
Gunfire Between Balloons	55
Breaking Balloons	55
Preparing for Integration	56
Readiness for Competition	57
Chapter 5 -Integration: Putting It All Together in Patterns	58
Pattern Problem Diagnostics	59-60
The Goal of Pattern Training	61
Why Patterns Matter	61
Cadence is Non-Negotiable	62
Pattern Work Without Guns	63
Pattern Teaching Process	64-66
Solving Most Pattern Problems	67-68
Practicing Patterns	68

(NOT THE FULL TABLE OF CONTENTS)

Here for the Horse.

The Competitive **SHOOTING HORSE**

is built around one belief:

**the discipline only moves forward
when the horsemanship improves.**

This manual is not a rulebook and it isn't a claim of authority. It's a structured method—one of many—built from decades of learning, competing, teaching, and most importantly, listening to the kind of horsemen who have earned their knowledge the hard way and shared it for the good of the horse and the sport.

Inside you'll find a practical, horse-first process for developing a confident, safe, competitive shooting horse—along with the rider habits that protect the horse as speed and pressure increase:

- ✓ Horse-first fundamentals for building trust and responsiveness
- ✓ Gun breaking and warm-up tips that keep horses willing and relaxed.
- ✓ Skills to blend control, timing, and pattern work with a horse-first approach
- ✓ Training strategies for a 60+ pattern discipline
- ✓ Troubleshooting issues before they become dangerous

Take what helps. Leave what doesn't. And if you have something to add, we welcome it. This is a living document, created for the good of the horse and the future of the discipline.

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