

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

Building Trust,
Balance
& Precision
for Competition



A Shooting Horse Training Manual



Shooting Horse Foundation Training Manual

Public Preview • 2026

Copyright © 2026 National Shooting Horse Association (NaSNA). All rights reserved.

This Public Preview may be shared freely in its original form. The full manual (complete chapters, progressions, and training resources) is included with NaSNA 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.

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)

What's Inside the Full Manual

The Public Preview gives you a look at the culture and training philosophy behind NaSHA's approach. The full **Shooting Horse Foundation Training Manual** goes deeper — with the practical structure, progressions, and troubleshooting guidance that help protect horses and keep riders moving forward.

This manual was written to be used as:

- a **training roadmap**
- a **reference tool**
- a way to stay **consistent from ride to ride**, even when you don't have help nearby

Inside the Full Manual, you'll find:

- **A complete foundation riding progression**

The riding skills a shooting horse must have before patterns, speed, or gunfire ever enter the conversation.

- **Gun-breaking and training strategies**

A structured, horse-first approach for introducing firing and building real confidence without creating anxiety or unsafe reactions.

- **Confidence training under pressure**

How to keep the horse mentally with the rider when the environment gets loud, fast, and unpredictable.

- **Pattern training & integration (the make-or-break stage)**

How to teach patterns without creating chargey horses, how to protect cadence, and how to build a horse that stays adjustable through every run.

- **Troubleshooting: what to do when things go sideways**

Clear guidance for common problems — including when it's okay to step back, how to get unstuck, and how to protect confidence.

- **The Four C's framework**

Everything ties back to the pillars we protect: **Cadence, Confidence, Collection, and Control.**

How to Access the Full Manual

The complete manual is included with:

- **NaSHA Membership, or**
- **Shooting Horse School registration**

If you'd like to start today, visit: **shootinghorse.com**

(And if you already have experienced mentors you trust, keep them close — this manual is designed to complement good horsemanship, not replace it.)

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.

National Shooting Horse Association
shootinghorse.com

© 2026 National Shooting Horse Association (NaSHA). All rights reserved.