

Introducing Your Horse to Gunfire from the Saddle

Mounted shooting is a popular equine sport. Once your horse is used to gunfire on the ground, use these steps to begin shooting from the saddle.

To learn how to introduce gunfire on the ground read this article that covers the process step-by-step; "Introducing Your Horse to Gunfire on the Ground." At this point your horse should be used to earplugs as well. Safety is always first. Do not move up a step until your horse is absolutely calm and confident with the one before and learn to handle a gun properly before you involve your horse in any way.

Begin at the Beginning

Begin your lesson by double-checking to determine that your horse is good with gunfire while being led and when you fire over his or her back. If all is fine, saddle up and repeat the exercises. The secret to making confident horses is to add only one step at a time. Anytime you find your horse nervous or confused go back to a step that he can do well.

Holsters and Guns

You have two basic choices when it comes to holsters; one that is connected to your saddle and one that is worn on your body. My preference for training is a pommel holster, one attached to the side of the saddle horn and easy to drop a gun into should an emergency arise.

If you are an experienced and confident gun handler go ahead and use a belt or shoulder holster. The important point is your ability to drop your gun quickly should you need to use both hands on your reins. For training purposes a .22 caliber double-action revolver works best. Use the lightest load blanks available. For horses who are having more difficulty gaining confidence use a cap gun first.

Aim is important. Never shoot in the space between your leg and the horse's head. Only shoot behind your leg so the blast goes away from your horse's head and neck.

Rhythm is Still the Key to Success

Using rhythmic stimuli or cues instills confidence in horses. When talking gunfire, using rhythm allows the horse to correctly anticipate the next big bang. Count time (1..2..3..) with a consistent rhythm as you work through these next steps. Left-handed shooters should reverse the directions given.

1. Warm your horse up properly at all three gaits.
2. Build a course using cones or panels. If you only have a long pasture fence available, use cones about 25 feet from the fence to create a 100 to 200 foot long "alley." Ride your horse at all three gaits back and forth through the alley. Stop completely on each end and rest. Turn around and repeat. If you have an arena use cones in the same way to outline an alley along the fence.
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4. While riding the pattern begin drawing your gun, and using a fully extended arm point it directly to your right, then cross over and point it directly to your left. Repeat using the same rhythm. Holster your gun after you have pointed the gun each way three times. Continue riding the pattern. Stop and rest.
 5. Ride the pattern at a walk, trot, or lope several more times, stopping at the end to rest each time. Select a gait based on your horse's confidence level. The next time, when you are about a third of the way through draw your gun, point to the right, point to the left, point to the right again (aiming to a place between your right leg and the horse's hip) and fire three times using the same rhythm, 1..2..3.. Holster your gun and finish the pattern. Rest. You do not want your horse to associate you pulling and pointing the gun with the noise at this stage. By showing your horse a pattern and doing all the steps you add only one thing each time. The rhythm and sequence of steps is all important.
 6. If your horse has a problem at any point, holster your gun and pick up both reins to calm and steady him or her. Unless it would be too dangerous, always finish the pattern quietly and rest. If your horse overreacts to the gunfire you probably have other lessons that need work before trying again.
 7. Continue the lesson by riding the same pattern and adding more rhythmic firing sequences. Never change the rhythm at this stage of training. Only add more gunfire and cross-over firing when your horse is calm with the previous step. You will change the pattern once your horse accepts gunfire well.

Practice - Practice - Practice

Schedule your training so you can do lessons with gunfire several days in a row. Once your horse is used to gunfire you need to maintain that confidence by practicing on a regular basis.