

## MOUNTED SHOOTING

# Q&A INTERVIEW BY KYLE PARTAIN Rock Clark

**NOW A MOUNTED-SHOOTING VETERAN,** Rock Clark is coming off his best season in the Cowboy Mounted Shooting Association. So far, this year hasn't been too shabby, either. But he's got just one goal in mind for 2009, and that's to win the world championship in Amarillo, Texas, this November.

### **How did you get into the sport?**

A buddy of mine came to me one day to look at a horse. He told me about mounted shooting and took me to a backyard where they were practicing. They put a set of guns on me and that's how I got started. I've ridden horses all my life, ever since I was able to get to a stump or fence post and climb on. I've hunted all my life, so guns and horses came naturally.

### **What about mounted shooting is most appealing?**

I've never done any type of a sport that was this much fun and still challenging at the same time. I've done barrel racing and pole bending, but this is really humbling. I might be on top of my game one week, and the next week I can't hit the broad side of a barn. What I really like is that my family does the sport with me. My 15-year-old son, Cody, is one of the top shooters in the nation. My wife, Terri, shoots with us, too.

### **You won the eastern and national championships in 2008. What goals do you have left?**

I'm still after that world championship. I've been close several times, but it's always been a little bad luck that kept me from getting there—a missed balloon here or a dropped gun. It's just got to be your day to win against so many talented shooters. There's no question that if I can go in and ride my ride, I've got a horse I truly believe no one can touch. He's solid, fast and pretty special.

### **What can you tell me about your horse?**

Joker is a 9-year-old Paint. I've had him for two years. His raw time is always in the top five at national events. There aren't many horses that can run with him. He's so catty, which can be a problem if I'm not careful. If I cue him just a touch, he goes. He is 16 hands or so, but very athletic.

### **Does he work better in bigger arenas?**

It's funny you say that. I had a horse before him named Dragon, about a 15-hand Paint. I also won nationals and eastern on him. Joker is actually a better all-around horse than Dragon was. There are some smaller pens Dragon should have excelled in and Joker is better in those pens.

Joker has problems with patterns that have us running in to the wall at an angle. He doesn't want to run into the smaller corners. But other than that, he's rock solid.

### **How much effort does it take to acclimate a horse to gunfire?**

Learning the shooting comes pretty easily. I ride them and they start trusting me. When I do train a horse to gunfire, I consider the horse and not myself. When I ride a horse into the arena for the first time, I don't care if I hit one balloon or all of them. I let the horse adapt to the gunfire, the balloons disappearing and the smoke. All my horses seem to have taken to it pretty good.

### **How long before your son catches up to you as a Level 6 shooter?**

The way he's going right now, within the next year or two he should be a Level 6. Everyone shoots in his own class, but everyone is also in the running for the overall title at our matches. He has won overall at some events and beaten the top guys. So, in a sense we are shooting against him right now.

I love watching him ride, love watching him shoot. I'd just as soon watch him as do it myself. This is our family time and our time together.

### **Did the top shooters intimidate you at your first national finals?**

I remember thinking I was pretty good when I got to my first nationals. I quickly found out I was a very small fish in a big pond. There were guys outrunning me by two or three seconds per stage—not per match, per stage. It was a real eye-opener. So, I had to sit back, watch and learn. I've learned little tricks from a lot of these guys.

### **What was the toughest part of learning to compete in mounted shooting?**

Course management. I've been around horses and guns most of my life, so putting the two together wasn't difficult. But I couldn't understand how to run the courses. I was running the same direction as the top shooters, but I was two or three seconds behind them. I found out there are ways to take each course in a few less steps. Once I got that down, things got easier. It's amazing that a stride here or there can make such a difference. Even today, after so many years in the sport, I can run a stage, then watch someone run it a different way and wonder why I didn't think of it. Little things you wouldn't think of can make the difference between winning and losing.

*To learn more about mounted shooting, visit [cowboymountedshooting.com](http://cowboymountedshooting.com).*



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