

# Lessons *from* Lenseigne

**Cowboy Mounted Shooting Sensation  
Kenda Lenseigne Discusses the Fastest  
Shooting Sport On Four Legs**

BY MIKE SEARSON

**I**f the sport of Cowboy Mounted Shooting has a face, it is that of Kenda Lenseigne.

She has spent most of her life on the back of a horse, riding competitively since the age of four. Throughout her childhood, she competed in both Western and English riding disciplines. She was introduced to the sport of mounted shooting in California, where she qualified for the World Championship after only her fourth competition.

An accomplished trainer of horses and riders, she went on to become the first female Cowboy Mounted Shooting Association (CMSA) World Champion, and has amassed more trophies and titles in shooting sports than just about any other.

Additionally, she has set 11 world records in mounted shooting, and works with numerous manufacturers to develop gear for the sport, as opposed to just endorsing products. In 2015, she was inducted into the CMSA Hall of Fame.

We sat down with Kenda to get a better understanding of the sport and to hear her thoughts on shooting, horses and training.



Photo by Scoop

**Gunslingers:** I know that you had a background in riding before you got into mounted shooting. What sort of riding was that?

**Kenda:** You could say that I was born on a horse, but technically, I started riding before I was born. When my mom was pregnant with me, she rode all the way until she couldn't fit in the saddle anymore. At just a few months old, and as soon as I could hold my own head up, I was in the saddle with her again.

At the age of two, I got my first pony, and was riding on my own; and [I] started competing in Western games (Gymkhana) at age four. As I grew, I competed in Western and English pleasure, and then moved to Texas after school to work on a cutting-horse ranch.

**Gunslingers:** Do you still compete in other competitions, or is it strictly mounted shooting?

**Kenda:** I have dabbled in Cowboy Action Shooting, and [I] also pick up a 1911 to compete at a USPSA [United States Practical Shooting Association] match here and there. Mounted shooting consumes my days, nights and weekends, so there's not a whole lot of time left for anything else.

**Gunslingers:** What made you decide to make the transition to mounted shooting?

**Kenda:** In 1998, I moved to California to work on another cutting-horse ranch, and by way of a friend of a friend, I was introduced to mounted shooting. I was invited to come out to a Western festival to see this "new sport," and ended up giving it a try while I was there.



When banking into a turn, you can't correct the horse too much, so you need to get on target quickly. (Photo by John Beckett Photography)

The rest is history, as I was hooked from the very first shot.

**Gunslingers:** You qualified for the World Championship after only your fourth competition. Were you a stronger rider or shooter (or both) than most?

**Kenda:** I was definitely a stronger rider, as I had not picked up a gun prior to that fateful day at the Western festival when I was talked into trying the sport. Handling firearms is a mechanical skill, but riding horses is a constantly

evolving skillset of balance, technique and rhythm; plus, there's the fact that you're dealing with another brain. It takes time to build a strong partnership with a horse, to convince them to work for you at high levels of speed, especially when adrenaline (and gunfire noise) enters the equation.

**Gunslingers:** I see mounted shooting competitions as being more than just "blanks and balloons." Besides requiring top shooting skills, it's made even



Uberti has introduced the Short Stroke CMS KL Pro, which is a special Kenda Lenseigne edition with a bird's-head grip and 3.5-inch barrel designed specifically for those involved in Cowboy Mounted Shooting.



Single-action revolvers were meant to be fired one-handed so you can hold the reins with the other. (Photo by Kristen Lynn Photography)

more difficult by being on the back of a moving horse. Is that a correct assessment?

**Kenda:** You would be absolutely correct. From the outside, at a quick glance in, I think the fact that we shoot blanks at balloons does plant a "Wild West show" image into some folks' perspective. In reality, the mounted shooting difficulty meter is through the roof.

There are so many factors that need to happen all at once to shoot clean. Here's a scenario to think about: We are shooting a Single Action Army, one-handed, at reactionary targets; traveling an average [speed] of 35 MPH through a course with multiple turns; changing guns halfway through the course; all the while, managing an animal; and oh yes, then there's the fact that we must remain focused and accurate while all this is happening.



Shooting on the move is difficult, but a true master of the sport, such as Kenda, makes it look easy. (Photo by Ken Amorosano)

**“We are shooting a Single Action Army, one handed, at reactionary targets; traveling an average [speed] of 35 MPH through a course with multiple turns; changing guns halfway through the course; all the while, managing an animal ... ”**

**Gunslingers:** Wow, that’s a lot to keep going! What would you say your fastest time is?

**Kenda:** My fastest time clocked this past year was a 9.3, in a full-size stadium arena (about the size of a football field), and all of the aforementioned fundamentals had to happen within those nine seconds!

**Gunslingers:** What is involved with the training of a horse for mounted shooting, beyond acclimating them to the noise?

**Kenda:** Training shooting horses includes countless hours of pattern work to get the horses to be responsive and efficient in their turns. As it’s technically a “team sport,” it’s important to build a

partnership with the horse, so they will work for you instead of doing their own thing.

**Gunslingers:** Will any horse make for a good mount, or is it something on the individual level of the animal?

**Kenda:** Each horse is individual, just like people. Some horses,



Cowboy Mounted Shooting started with period clothing, as in SASS, but the rules have lightened up over the years to allow for more comfortable and modern Western athletic clothing. (Photo by Scoop)

depending on temperament, take to the sport immediately, where others require more time. I look at breeding, conformation and temperament as three basic qualities when selecting a mounted-shooting horse.

After that, starting the horse properly on gunfire, and then training it to become an athlete and partner is key.

A common comment from horse people when I tell them I am a mounted shooter is, “My horse would never accept gunfire noise...” My response is that, “You just never know.” I have owned horses that have been quiet and calm about everything until they hear gunfire. In contrast, I have also had horses that were high-strung

and spooky, and accept the noise from the first shot. I suppose horses, like kids, will make a liar out of you every chance they get!

**Gunslingers:** Are there particular breeds that are better athletes in the sport than others?

**Kenda:** The most popular breed in the sport is the American Quarter Horse. They are bred to achieve high levels of speed and agility in a short amount of time, sort of like a Porsche sports car!

**Gunslingers:** Are there any special tack requirements or gear that is tailored more for the sport: saddle, stirrups, bit, etc.?

**Kenda:** Our rule book indicates that any style [of] saddle may be used, but there are certain advantages of using a saddle designed for the sport. In 2008, I was fortunate to work with Circle Y Saddles to collaborate on a design specifically made for mounted shooting. It includes a forward-tilted horn to allow clearance for the rider’s holsters, and a few other design features that make it unique to mounted shooting.

Circle Y is a 50+ year-old company and a leader in Western saddles; it is a huge honor to have a line of saddles that bear my name under the brand. I also helped create a bit line with Professionals Choice, another leader in the equine industry,

**KENDA’S CREDENTIALS**

Some of Kenda’s honors include:

- 2014 CMSA Overall World Champion
- 2012 CMSA Overall National Champion
- 2010 CMSA Overall National Champion
- 2009 CMSA Overall World Champion
- 2012/2013 CMSA Western U.S. Champion
- 2012 CMSA Winter Champion
- 2011 CMSA Central U.S. Overall Champion
- 2010 Winner of the Bianchi Cup Celebrity Pro-Am



Those blanks pack enough wallop to break a balloon at 20 feet. (Photo by Mark Quigley Photography)



Fancy, but practical, Kenda has her own signature line of holsters with Bianchi Cowboy.

to enable riders to get the most out of their “steering power.”

**Gunslingers:** Is there any part of a mounted-shooting competition that you find difficult or challenging or something you could get better at?

**Kenda:** Any competition, in any discipline, is a constantly evolving skillset. There are so many factors that go into competitive shooting, and just when you think you’re on “top,” something can happen at any given time and humble you. That’s the fun part, and the part that

continues to charge my batteries.

My latest challenge is that I am on a new horse this year. My horse partner of 10 years had a career-ending accident last spring, so I am working on achieving that same level of partnership with my new mare.

**Gunslingers:** You are sponsored by Uberti/Benelli. Are your revolvers “off the shelf” models or are they built specially for you? Do you make further refinements after you get them?

**Kenda:** I signed on with Uberti last year, as we are working on giving the brand a fresh new look, so to speak. We are a few months away from launching a new “Kenda” signature line of SAA revolvers that will be competition-ready out of the box.

I am confident that the new guns will revolutionize the sport, as they will come with a short-stroke action, which provides the entire job in half the time, and low and wide hammer spur for easier “one-handed” pull.

A big challenge of our sport is getting that hammer cocked back with one hand while moving at 35MPH, especially if the targets are close together.

**Gunslingers:** I notice you use a bird’s head-grip frame. Does the bird’s head give you better leverage for cocking the hammer one-handed while riding, or does it simply fit your hand better?

**Kenda:** The bird’s head is a great fit for my hand. As grips are a personal preference, unique to each user,

it was what I was introduced to years ago and I feel that it works just right for me.

**Gunslingers:** Obviously, you were an accomplished rider from the start, but this is a shooting sport, so what do you feel is your strongest attribute as a shooter?

**Kenda:** Given the fact that I have been riding so long, I feel that my ability to pilot my horse to get the most out of my pattern work is my strongest attribute. I also feel that I am a solid mental competitor.

### THE WILD WEST SHOW CONNECTION

Cowboy Mounted Shooting, or Western mounted shooting, got its start in the early to mid-1990s as a way to combine the skill at arms of Cowboy Action Shooting with an equestrian sport; however, it harkens back to shooting exhibitions held at Wild West shows over 100 years ago.

At the close of the 19th century, shooters would shoot glass balls while riding at full gallop; modern competitors use blank ammunition and fire at balloons for the sake of safety.



Kenda trains horses and riders to compete in mounted shooting. (Photo by Ken Amorosano)

Several years back, I would let my nerves get the best of me—adrenaline was my Kryptonite. After studying a mental-management program, my adrenaline is now my fuel.

Pressure now helps me achieve clarity and focus, and that's often where the game is won or lost. Like most competitive shooters, I have been in the highest pressure situations, and mental focus was the winner of the game; for example, in 2009, going into the last stage, I was <sup>2</sup>/<sub>10</sub> of a second in the lead to be the first woman to ever win the World

Championship overall.

With that kind of prize at the end of the line, one can imagine the angst sitting in the saddle with me. I took a deep breath and told myself that it was “only 10 targets,” the same balloons that I shoot at home, and the rest “made history.”

**Gunslingers:** You proved your skills as a shooter off the horse, too, when you won the Bianchi Cup Celebrity Pro-AM in 2010. How did that make you feel?

**Kenda:** Shooting the Bianchi Cup Pro-AM was a turning point in my career as a professional shooter.

Not only was it a blast to participate, and exciting to witness some of the world's best shooters in action, but it opened a door of opportunity.

I met Scott Carnahan of Safariland, who set me up with a Bianchi rig to shoot the Pro-AM, and afterward, we developed a plan to breathe some fresh air into the Bianchi Cowboy brand, creating a line of mounted-shooting holsters, specifically designed for my sport.

**Gunslingers:** What do you think poses the biggest challenge for someone wanting to get into the sport of mounted shooting?

**Kenda:** I teach new riders on [an] average of five days a week, and also train horses for the sport; I am fortunate enough to live near Ben Avery Shooting Range, [which] has two full-size arenas where I can teach and practice without hassle. (Meaning, I don't have to worry about disturbing my neighbors or having the sheriff called every time I shoot.)

With that, I would say the biggest challenge for most is finding places to practice. Whereas a CAS or Pistol shooter might easily find a range in any given town, mounted shooters have to locate arenas that will accept gunfire noise.

As America is getting smaller by the day, finding places to ride and shoot are becoming more and more challenging. **GNSL**

**MORE KENDA**

To find out more about Kenda and the sport of mounted shooting, visit her website at: [kendalenseigne.com](http://kendalenseigne.com).

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