

CMSA History 101

Kenda Talks About The Past

By Megan Erickson

Kenda Lenseigne is CMSA™'s current World Champion Cowgirl, and is the only woman to have ever won the High Overall at the World Championship. To hear a champion in any sport talk about how they got where they are is often inspiring. To be one, you have to earn it, especially in mounted shooting where a fat checkbook doesn't always buy the grit that it takes to rise to the top. I caught up with Kenda to ask her about her start in the sport and what her journey was like to get her where she is today.

She got her start in mounted shooting in 1998 at age 23 in Southern California. She was watching a demo and was summoned from the crowd to "try the new sport". She had no prior experience with firearms, but had ridden her whole life so gave it a whirl. She entered her first match the weekend after and the rest is a 17-year history.

In 1998 CMSA™ was still in its infancy. It was governed by modified Single Action Shooting Society (SASS) rules, which often times were open to interpretation. She recalls at the time most of the competitors were still new, with a cross section of ground shooters with horses, and horse people who liked guns. Winners crowned World and National champions in those days were often those who won by default through missing the fewest number of balloons, with multiple seconds separating first and second place. Contrast that with today's sport, where the difference

between the top riders can be as little as a few hundredths of a second.

She reminisces about the days when the course book was not necessarily a book, but often hand drawings of a pattern that came back from a shoot in Arizona, where CMSA™ was headquartered at the time. "I remember the 'rule' being if a rider fell off their horse mid stage, as long they could catch the horse before it crossed the timing line, mount back up and finish the run, it was legal. There was no such thing as a 60 second time limit. People would drop guns, stop, pick them up and then continue shooting the stage, or get into fistfights with the range master because of a questionable call. There was a required "safety rider" in the arena at all times to catch horses or people if things went awry. It was truly the wild west in those early days!"

Like a lot of us, she started out with borrowed guns, horse, saddle and holsters. Just about everything but the clothes on her back were borrowed to begin with, and even those were hand me downs given the strict "period correct" dress code. "I was sharing an Appaloosa gelding who came with a 16" slick seat wide tree saddle, the kind with laced up stirrups and big floppy saddle bags. The stirrups were too long so I wrapped a big wad of vet wrap around the bottom of them to keep myself in, like blocks on the pedals!"

"My guns were heavy long barreled mismatched tanks; I remember having to memorize which holster had my 'rundown gun' and which held the 'random gun,' because they were so different. My holsters at first were pommel holsters (they came with the borrowed horse and saddle) and were also mismatched antiques and wouldn't stay open at the top without a gun in them, so gun changes were a little challenging. Those were the times when just about everyone in the sport was piecing together gear, but didn't care as long as we got to ride and shoot!!"



I will add at this point that Kenda was one of the pioneers of sponsored endorsements and product developments within the sport starting in 2008 when she collaborated with Circle Y to design the first ever mounted shooting saddle on the market. This followed with holsters, guns and reins to name a few more "game changers". It sure says a lot for experience lending a hand to a design process.

Back to the story:

Her shooting horse died in 2002 and she took a break for a year until she met a little sorrel trail horse named Lieutenant Justin. She bought this soon to be multiple world champion and world record horse for \$2000 in 2004 and trained him herself. "Justin was a tough nut to crack, we worked and worked and worked to find the right compromise for our partnership. I was convinced for the first year that he was just running terrified of gunfire. In fact, the first World Championship I took him to, we had two 60 second runs because he ran through the timer." Dedication, perseverance and patience are what makes Kenda tick. She's kind and friendly and will go the extra mile for anyone who asks for help. She's a humble athlete with a positive-thinking philosophy, and is the first to admit that she's been there. She's made those mistakes. Yet, she always has a way of making the frustrations that come with mounted shooting seem like they are a challenge worth overcoming.

When asked her best piece of advice for new shooters she says, "Guidance and training is a must; learn from the folks who have been doing this awhile and have the results to back it up. They should also know the ins and outs of the sport, and done the trial and error so they can help guide you in the right direction." She adds, "Don't be afraid to do your homework when it comes to aligning yourself with a trainer. It's no different from any other investment. There are a lot of trainers out

there to choose from. Observe their program. Watch their students and the horses that come out of their barn. If you like what you see, it will probably be a good fit."



Photos 1 and 2 Circa 1999-2000,
courtesy of Barb Green

Photo 3 courtesy of Sarah Withers

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