

# First Comes Form

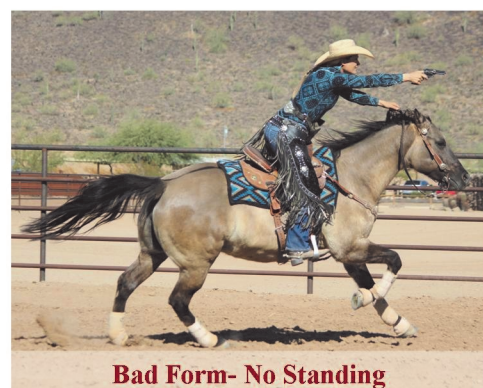
*By Kenda Lenseigne*



We've all seen them, the perfect riders who make a stage look effortless and darn-near poetic. They are flawless, seemingly in slow motion yet they turn magical scores on the clock every time they step into the arena. Sure, they've spent the time with their horses building their relationship, but what sets them apart is their form.

We have in Cowboy Mounted Shooting™, a diverse group of riders. Some come from different Western or English backgrounds, some come straight from the trail, while others are just getting into the saddle for the first time. Different disciplines require different form and mounted shooting is not exempt from that rule. It's important, when analyzing ways to improve our form, to not remain entirely stuck in a riding style from a different discipline. Before we get too offended by that statement, let me explain. Imagine what a jockey would look like stepping into the starting gate at the track perfectly perched like a western pleasure rider, or a team roper backing into the box, deep-seated like a reiner on a 20's sliding stop. Sure, there are general horsemanship methods that are the same in all of horseback riding – such as the ability to stay on, but each discipline has its own set of form guidelines unique to that sport.

We are riders from the waist down, and shooters from the waist up.



## LOWER HALF IS THE RIDER

Horses are rear wheel drive vehicles. As a horse's motor is located in the hind quarters, it's important to stay seated deeply in your saddle to keep the hind quarters engaged, as this will help keep your horse working off its rear end and driving forward without front end interference. To help visualize this, imagine a 'Go!' button located on the spine of your horse under your tailbone/saddle. To make the machine run, you have to keep the button held down throughout the duration of the stage. This doesn't mean leaning back, as leaning back will cause a lack of balance and serious wind resistance; it could also cause the problem of getting behind on our shots.

Keeping a deep seat also means not standing up in the saddle. Standing in the saddle shifts our weight to the front end of the horse, making it more difficult for them to do their job. It also creates a disconnection from the horse and in turn encourages loss of balance and interference with our horse's forward momentum. Imagine having someone on your shoulders or riding piggy back; if they are "disconnected" and bouncing around opposite of your movement, you may spend your time just trying to stay balanced and upright.



**Bad Form- Shooter**

**Good Form- Shooter**





### UPPER HALF IS THE SHOOTER

If you've ever shot live ammo, you will know that it's important to "get into your gun", meaning connecting the eye to the hand and canting your upper body slightly forward with your feet firmly planted on the ground. Generally, this is because shooting anything other than blanks means there will be some recoil to deal with. If you're not into-the-gun, you are more likely to miss your target or worse, be blasted backward off your feet. This stance translates across to other sports where perfect form is required for success. Consider the way a boxer looks when lining up for a punch, or a pitcher's position when throwing a ball. Each one of these scenarios is relatable to how our waist-up form should look to promote greater shot accuracy, and a viable connection on our targets.

Back to the saddle.... Because you already have a perfect and balanced seat as discussed in the first part of this article, here's the how-to on having winning shooting form.

### THE SLOUCHY C

Make a C-shape out of your abdomen, i.e. crunch down your lower back to lower your core and center of gravity. As you draw your gun and extend your arm, connect the hand and the eye by closing the gap between your chin and shoulder. Remember not to tilt your head to one side to accomplish this as the human brain isn't wired to process images, or accurately judge distance in motion effectively this way. I'm guessing that for most, this will be the first time anyone ever told you that it is ok, even preferred to slouch when atop your mount; that is because we are looking at this posture from a shooter's perspective from the waist up.



Whether you are a brand new level 1 looking to start out with good habits, or an advanced mounted shooter wanting to find that extra edge, being first in form blazes the path for first in class.

All demonstration photos courtesy of Barb Maggiore



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