

COWBOY ACTION SHOOTING

The Basics

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“What Is It?”

Cowboy Action Shooting embodies the spirit of the “Old West” and is a sport in which contestants compete with firearms typical of that era. It requires two Single Action revolvers, a pistol caliber lever action rifle, and an old time style shotgun. Firearms can be original, but most use replicas made by modern manufactures. The competition is set in a characterization of the west of the 1800’s. It is a timed event in which shooters compete in different “Categories”. However, the level at which you compete is only set by your own comfort level and competitive nature.

Shooters adopt an attitude towards their participation called "The Spirit of the Game." It is a code by which we live. Competing in "The Spirit of the Game" means you try your best, dress the part, follow the rules, and respect each other and the traditions of the Old West. Some folks would call it nothing more than good sportsmanship. We call it "Spirit of the Game."

As the sport grew in popularity, in order to keep some sense of uniformity, a group of shooters started “The Single Action Shooting Society” or “SASS”. It is an international organization created to preserve and promote the sport of Cowboy Action Shooting. Today SASS endorses affiliated clubs around the world and disseminates rules and procedures to ensure safety and consistency in Cowboy Action Shooting matches.

However, the sport is as much social as it is shooting. You will find a fun atmosphere and will undoubtedly make many new friends. In “The Spirit of the Game” each participant adopts a name or “alias” appropriate to a character or profession of the late 19th century, a Hollywood Western star, western character from fiction, or one made up that represents their personality in a Cowboy Way. You will want to join SASS so you can register your alias and have it assigned uniquely to you so no-one else can use that name. Costuming is then developed accordingly. Simple western costuming is all that is required and you can develop yours over time. Many shooters gain more enjoyment from the costuming and the social aspect of our sport than from the shooting competition itself. Regardless of a shooter’s individual area of interest, events provide regular opportunities for fellowship and fun with like-minded folks and families.

Shooters also pick a “Category” in which to compete. Each category has certain guidelines both for shooting style and for costuming such as: shooting black-powder or modern smokeless powders; shooting one-handed, called “Duelist”, or shooting with both hands, called Traditional. Some have stringent costume requirements like “*Classic Cowboy/Cowgirl*” and “Hollywood Western”. Other categories are age related, like “Senior” (over 60) and some are gender related, such as “Lady Duelist”. So in essence, shooters can pick a style and genre that reflects their personality and comfort level. New shooters normally start in the traditional categories that have fewer requirements. All the categories are explained on the SASS website. Shooters are not locked to a category and can change whenever they want. You select your category at the beginning of each event.

“Attending The Match”

Different shooting clubs hold competition events, “matches”, at various locations and times of the year. You do not have to be a member of a club in order to shoot with them; but joining one many times provides opportunities for even more social activities. Clubs welcome cowboy action shooters from all over, even other countries. At each match the shooters gather into what we call a “Posse”. Each posse can vary from 10 to 25

shooters. If the posse gets larger than 25 it is normally split into more than one Posse. The number of posses depends on the number of shooters in the Match. Shooters can sign up for a particular posse in order to shoot with friends or family, or can be randomly assigned to one. Because of this structure each posse will consist of shooters from different “Categories”. That keeps it interesting and always gives an opportunity to make new friends.

When the match starts each Posse will start shooting a different set of targets or “Stage”. Each stage consists of Pistol, Rifle and Shot Gun targets and has a “Scenario” describing how the shooters are to shoot that particular stage. The Scenario is always explained completely before anyone starts shooting. As a beginner the “RO”, (Range Officer/Timer), will always be there to guide and help you through the stage. When all shooters in the posse have finished shooting that particular stage they will all move to another stage. The numbers of stages vary from 5 to as high as 15 at Major events. The normal monthly club matches use about 5 to 6 stages. The match is ended when all shooters have shot all stages.

At each stage shooters will wait their turn to shoot. A lot of camaraderie is evident during this time as shooters talk and work together to make it a fun time for all. While waiting, participants will volunteer to help by acting as Score Keeper, Counter or Supervise the Loading or Unloading tables. Some will help pick up a shooter’s empty brass for reloading. You can learn a lot by watching or “Helping Out” at whatever you feel comfortable doing. Shooters load their firearms at a “loading table” under supervision for safety, and when they have completed shooting the stage, they head for the “unloading table”, where their firearms are inspected to ensure they are empty and safe before returning them to their cart. Shooters are required to point their firearms up in the air at all times for safety. When shooting, always point firearms Down Range (toward the targets) and with-in what is called “The 170 Rule” (the barrel must never point more than 170 degrees of a circle from down range position). It’s a very serious penalty if a shooter forgets safety for even a moment and points any firearms toward the audience or handles it in an unsafe manner. Doing so means either a disqualification from the stage, or even more serious, a disqualification from the match.

“Shooting The Stage”

When it is the shooter’s turn, they will take their firearms to the loading bench where they will load them and get ready to shoot. When called, they will approach the shooting line under supervision of the “RO”. Once the shooter is “Ready”, the timer will sound and the shooter will start. They will try to hit the revolver, rifle, and shotgun targets in the prescribed sequence described in the scenario while being timed or “On the Clock”. If the Shooter does not shoot the stage in accordance with the scenario instructions, they receive a “Procedural” time adjustment. The idea is to shoot the Stage in as short of time as you can. **(Safely, I may add)**. If the shooter hits all the targets as directed, they have then shot the stage “Clean” with no misses. The addition of 5 seconds is added to their total time for each miss and 10 seconds added to their total time if they receive a procedural. As a new shooter it is best to not worry or be pressured about the time or number of misses. **Just concentrate on shooting and having a good time.** Speed and accuracy will come with practice. After the shooter has completed shooting the stage, they will proceed to the unloading table where they will unload and have their firearms checked by the unloading attendant.

How well the shooter does in the competition is determined by the total time over the series of stages in the match. Recognition is given to the top shooters of each category and each club will give recognition in its own way. But as the saying goes; “It’s not how good you shoot; it’s how good of a time you have shooting”.

See you on the range!