

Shooting, a great spectator sport

By Lydia Meyer
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For George Hartman, mounted shooting represents the perfect pairing of two of his favorite hobbies: riding horses and shooting guns.

As president of the Show Me Mounted Shooters, Hartman participates in mounted shooting competitions across the state and directs the local club, which will host a competition in the arena at the Jefferson City Jaycees Cole County Fair on Wednesday evening.

Hartman stumbled upon his "ultimate sport" when he viewed a competition in St. Louis several years ago, he said.

In 2009, Hartman helped establish the Show Me Mounted Shooters whose membership numbers have grown to 30. The group often practices at the Ashland Arena, Hartman said.

In mounted shooting, riders race to complete a pattern during which they will attempt to shoot 10 balloons with black powder blanks that pop the balloon by burning through the balloon's surface, Hartman said.

Each competition consists of riders completing up to four different patterns, and judges may penalize riders for failing to pop balloons, knocking over obstacles in the

arena or not running the pattern correctly, he said.

Riders shoot two different single-action .45 Colt revolvers over the course of completing each pattern and must swiftly change guns while riding in order to not accrue penalties, he said.

"It's a lot of action," he said.

As one of 12,000 nationwide competitors, Hartman participates in the "fastest growing equine sport" for both the satisfaction of riding, as well as the social aspect, he said.

"We have a lot of fun interacting with each other," Hartman said of the team members of the Show Me Mounted Shooters.

Hartman described the other members of the Show Me Mounted Shooters as a "great bunch of people" who are "like an extended family."

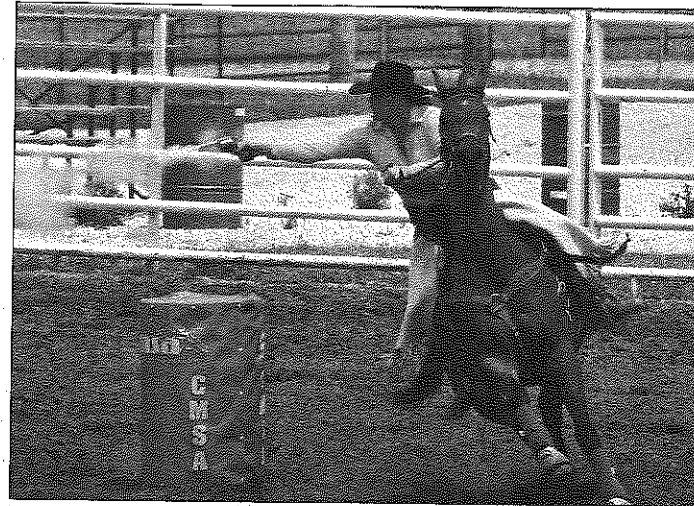
"We enjoy being around people with common interests," he said.

A self-described former "recreational trail rider," Hartman said he has improved his riding skills dramatically since beginning to compete in 2003.

"I'm a much better rider than when I started," he said.

Hartman's enhanced riding skills even catalyzed his achievements with his capturing of a state championship title in his division in 2004.

Hartman said he experiences "sheer



submitted photo
Laura Smith fires her pistol aboard her horse during her routine with the Show-Me-Mounted Shooters. The shooters will be a headline act at this year's fair.

enjoyment" when "running in front of crowds," and crowds respond enthusiastically to riders' success.

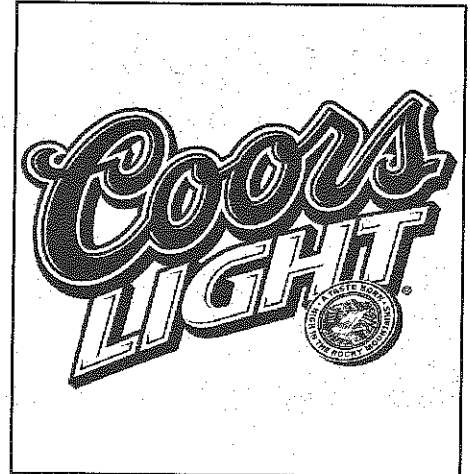
"The crowds cheer and like to see people do well. Crowds always seem to think it's exciting," he said.

Competitor Laura Smith heartily agrees with Hartman.

"The crowd gets into it. It's an absolutely wonderful spectator sport," she said.

Smith discovered the sport as a spectator when her husband Travis first began participating in mounted shooting, she said.

Smith, Travis and their children now all "compete heavily every weekend during the summer" in mounted shooting, she said.



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"The fact that my family enjoys the same thing I do is gratifying. We all cheer each other on," she said.

Smith is currently treasurer of the Show Me Mounted Shooters.

Travis began participating in mounted shooting around 11 years ago, while Smith has been shooting for around five years, she said.

Their daughter, Katie 18, has been shooting for about nine years, and their son, Zane, 6, rides as a "wrangler," which includes riding patterns but not shooting guns, she said.

Although the entire family has enjoyed "various equestrian sports" throughout the years, the Smiths were excited to discover a sport that was a "natural fit for our family," according to Smith.

"We were always into horses and looking for something we all enjoy. It's so much more fulfilling and a richer experience to haul (horses) every weekend with family," she said.

Beyond Smith's nuclear family, she has fostered kinship with other families of competitors within the team and at state and regional competitions, she said.

"When I look around (at the competitions), I see family. There's people we know and trust. There's nothing like it," she said.

Smith believes participation in the

sport enhances a variety of her children's positive personality traits, including patience, understanding and humility. The sport also offers her children a healthy thrill-seeking outlet, Smith said.

"I have always thought that children need that adrenaline rush. The sport provides that for them in a unique way. It keeps children on the path we (Travis and Laura) want them to take," she said.

Mounted shooting also has provided Smith with the opportunity to further her personal horsemanship skills, she said.

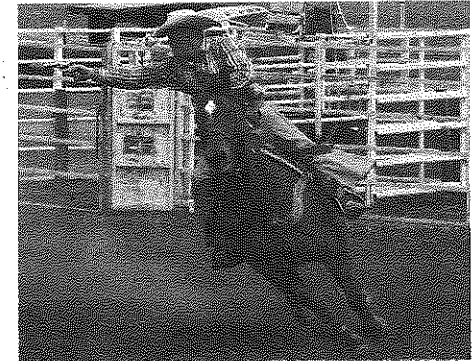
"You have to have a deep bond with your horse. You have to know each other so well and trust. It's a huge learning experience," she said.

Smith's "learning experiences" have evidently translated into accomplishment for her and her family.

Smith won the Level 4 Ladies Division at the Missouri State Fair last year, a victory she considers to be "the biggest win of her life," she said.


Additionally, at the I-70 Shootout in Ashland last year, Laura, Travis and Katie captured first, second and third place, respectively.

Contrary to some of Smith's more difficult growing experiences, "... it's a whole different ballgame when you make one run that is phenomenal and you're happy and your horse is happy. There is no better feeling in the world," she said.




Submitted photo

Travis Smith, along with his wife Laura and kids made shooting the family sport.



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