

# SHOOTING STAR

Teenage cowgirl competes with family and serves as mentor to younger riders.

**A**s a toddler riding in the saddle with her mother, Katie Smith's love for riding horses was more than obvious. Her parents were always careful not to allow their love for horses to influence her interests. But she was born with a passion for riding. Today, Katie is a teenage champion in a sport not all that familiar to most — cowboy mounted shooting. Used as a military training exercise a little more than 100 years ago, cowboy mounted shooting was revived as a sport in 1996. It's considered the fastest-growing equestrian sport in the country.

Her parents remember it like it was yesterday. They got Katie her first pony for her fourth birthday; a palomino mare named Crystal. Although she had been shown all over at various miniature pony shows, Crystal was never trained for riding. Katie learned to ride while breaking that pony on a simple lunge line — a long rope that allows the horse to go in circles around a person in the center of the arena.

At age 6, Katie would run straight from the school bus to the pasture and jump on her pony, often bareback with no halter or bridle. Wherever that pony went, no matter how fast, there was a little blond-haired girl smiling and clinging to its back. Safety is always a priority with young riders. Katie's parents required her to always ride with a helmet well into her teens.

According to her mother, Katie has always had a bit of a wild side. "No matter how we threatened, she'd still find a way to scare the bejesus out of us on that pony," says Laura Smith, who also trains horses for competition. "The song 'Katie Wants a Fast One' often comes to mind."

Now entering her senior year at Harrisburg High School, Katie rides anything but slow and competes in mounted shooting competitions across the state. She began competing in the youth division, also known as wranglers, at age 8.

The Smith family belongs to the Show-Me Mounted Shooters, part of the Cowboy Mounted Shooters Association (CMSA).

Mounted contestants compete in this fast-action timed event using two .45 caliber single-action revolvers, each loaded with five

rounds of specially prepared blank ammunition. Competitors shoot balloon targets while riding through a course at speeds of up to 40 miles per hour.

Local competitions generally do not fill the stands. It's more about families coming together for a weekend of riding, shooting and camping out. The annual I-70 Shootout is no exception. Katie and her family enjoyed a successful Memorial Day weekend of mounted shooting at this year's event.

The Shootout attracted 49 competitors to the Cedar Valley Riders Arena in Ashland this year. Laura won her first Overall Championship and also took Overall Champion Cowgirl at the Shootout. Katie's father, Travis, who is a farrier and makes branding irons, also scored well as the men's overall champion. Katie, riding her new mare, Felina, for the first time in competition, took third in her class.

"It takes years for a rider to get proficient at this sport," says Katie. "It also takes years for our horses to become adjusted and perform with enough speed and precision to help us win." She is training Felina herself.

As an honor student who consistently puts up straight As, Katie shows dedication in and out of the saddle. "She's the kind of kid that you know is going to be okay," says a proud mom, Laura. "Life might knock her down at times, but at the end of the day, I know she'll come up swinging and gritting her teeth to try harder next time."

With her family running two full-time farms and three businesses, not to mention health problems within the family over the past five years, Katie has not had the opportunity to compete at the national level. Believing she has the ability to win a national title, Katie's parents hope to open that gate for her in the next year.

Consistently at the top of the leaderboard, often winning entire events, Katie's biggest accomplishment to date is the

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**Katie Smith**  
and the Show-Me  
Mounted Shooters



High Overall Championship at the Gunsmoke in the Coliseum event at the Missouri State Fairgrounds this past April. She has also won the High Point Cowgirl with the Show-Me Mounted Shooters for the past two years. Her name is consistently found in the top five competitors in the state, frequently in the top 10 of the four-state region of Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas and Kansas.

Katie's role as Wrangler Coordinator allows her to serve as a mentor to many young riders. Her encouragement and patience has led to the early success of these cowboys and cowgirls in training, like her little brother Zane, 5, and Will Buckner, 11, of Ashland. These experiences have influenced Katie to pursue an education degree and a career as a high school history teacher. For now, though, she remains focused on mastering her sport of choice.



Above: Katie rides beside her brother, Zane, as they practice at the Smith family's arena.



Above: Katie shoots a balloon target during a practice run.

Online Extra

Check out scenes from the I-70 Shootout in the digital version of *Rural Missouri*. Find it at [www.booneelectric.coop](http://www.booneelectric.coop).

[www.cowboymountedshooting.com](http://www.cowboymountedshooting.com)  
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