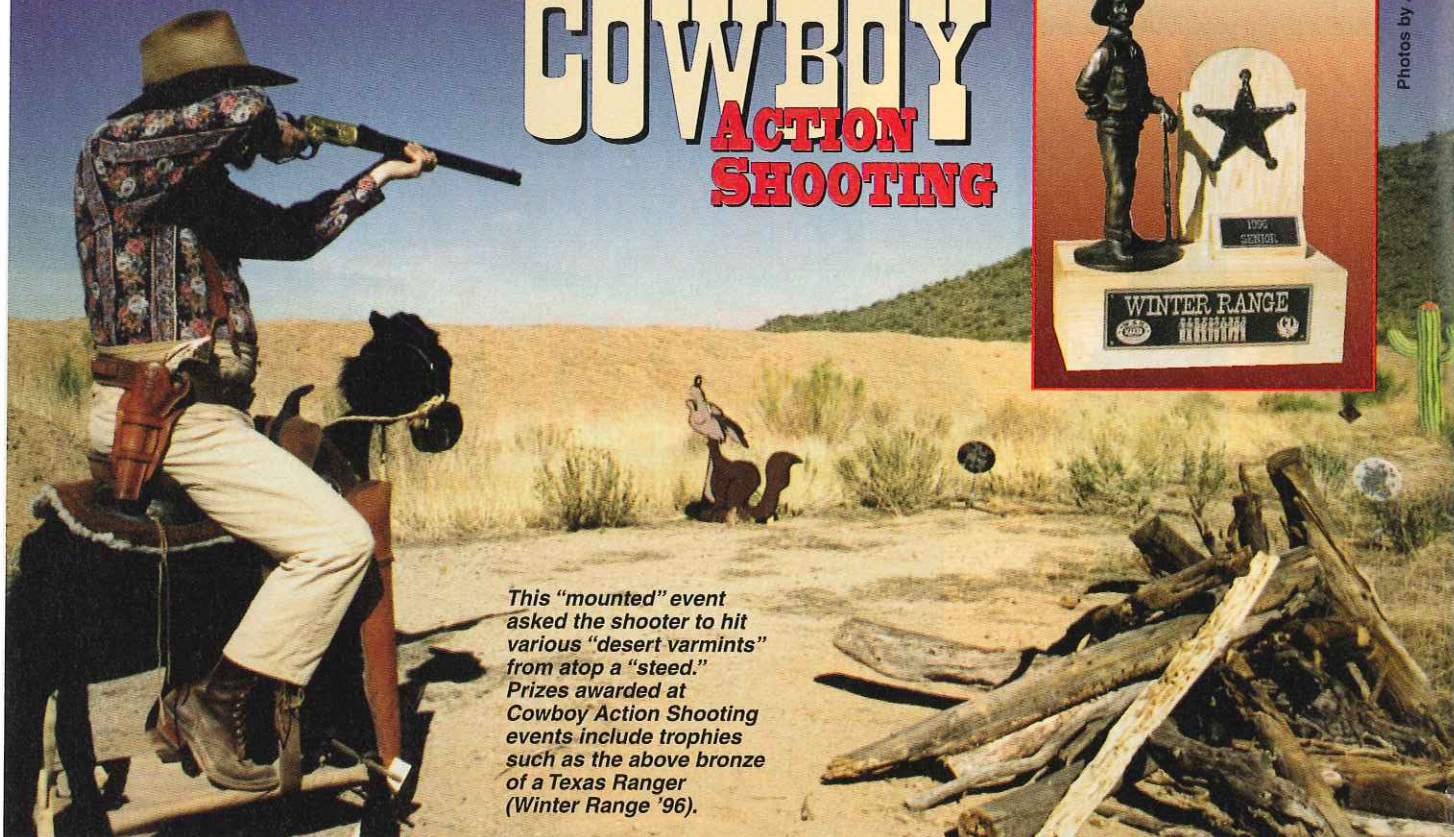


COWBOY ACTION SHOOTING

Photos by Author



This "mounted" event asked the shooter to hit various "desert varmints" from atop a "steed." Prizes awarded at Cowboy Action Shooting events include trophies such as the above bronze of a Texas Ranger (Winter Range '96).

Step Into the Old West and Earn Your Spurs in this Fun, Fast-Growing Shooting Sport

By Philip "Punxsutawney Phil" Schreier

A hired gun sits at a table in a dusty Western saloon. He gingerly fingers his cards, glancing at them distractedly. A light film of sweat covers his brow. Despite the powerful scent of sagebrush and leather, he senses only anticipation in the air.

Suddenly, he eyes five assailants; three behind the bar, two through the windows. The gunfighter's chair scrapes the floor as he springs to his feet. His right hand slaps his thigh and slides up, his thumb catching the big Colt's hammer as his fingers

grasp the ivory-stocked handle. He levels the barrel at the bar and squeezes the trigger.

The Peacemaker bucks and rolls in his hand. Recocking, again and again he fires. Next, he aims through the window and snaps off two more quick shots. In a matter of seconds it is over and the shooter eases the now-warm gun back into its holster.

A judge yells "Clear!" and range officials and their assistants come forward to reset the "bad guys" while the shooter anxiously walks over to the scorer to check his time. Behind him the next competitor prepares to experience the same scenario.

Such it was at the 1997 Winter Range Competition at the Ben Avery Shooting Complex in Phoenix, Arizona, one of the bigger matches in Cowboy Action Shooting, the fastest growing shooting sport. Winter Range and Southern California's End of Trail, the two largest annual events in the U.S., together draw 1,000 shooters and several thousand others who visit to enjoy the fun. An estimated 20,000 people participate in the sport annually.

A typical match set-up. The scorekeeper (1) prepares to write down the shooter's raw time received from the timekeeper (2). The shooter (3) goes about the business of shooting the match under the watch of the safety officer (4).



Enthusiasts in this sport don Western period-style clothing, adopt alter egos and aliases, strap on six-guns, and heft vintage-designed rifles and shotguns. They engage targets in carefully conceived scenarios designed around themes associated with the Old West or Western movies.

In short, the sport offers adults and young shooters the opportunity to play "cowboy" with real guns in friendly competition. With its costumes, characters, and fun challenges, Cowboy Action Shooting (CAS) has quickly established itself as a very enjoyable and accessible sport.

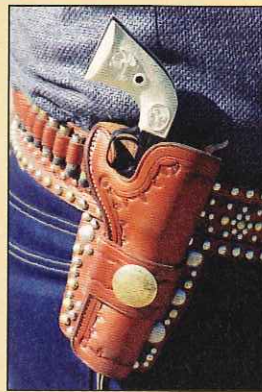
SINGLE ACTION SHOOTING SOCIETY

Harper Creigh wears badge #1 of the Single Action Shooting Society. His alias is "Judge Roy Bean," and he is a co-founder of the Society, the man considered the father of Cowboy Action Shooting. The Judge is a maker of architectural models and currently lives in southern California (though he's a native Texan). A former IPSC competitor, Creigh felt that the cost of competition in that sport was too high—not in the dollars spent, but in the lack of camaraderie among the shooters.

Thrilled with the idea of merging the excitement of practical shooting with the romance of the Old West, Creigh and some friends held their first Cowboy Action Shooting match in 1978. By 1982 they had established End of Trail as the World Championship of Cowboy Action Shooting. In



Cimarron Firearms Co.'s nickel-plated "New Thunderer."



Colt Single-Action Army with a 4 3/4" barrel and faux ivory grips.



A first generation Colt Single-Action Army with a 4 3/4" barrel.

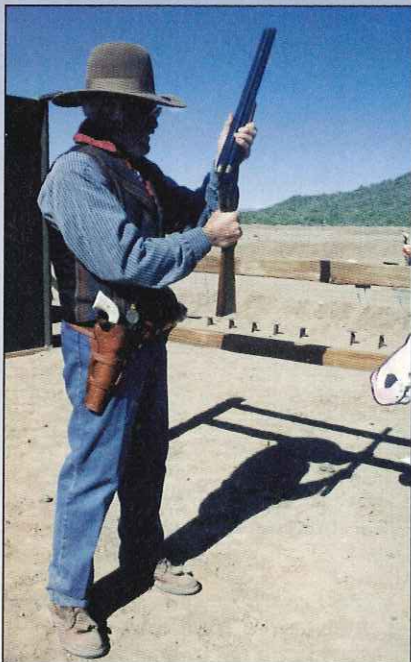
1987 they founded the Single Action Shooting Society (SASS), the sport's governing body and official End of Trail host.

Today, SASS has over 14,000 members and shows steady growth. Asked why he thought the sport was catching on so quickly, the Judge said, "Two reasons. One, it is an attractive and positive aspect of the shooting sports and, two, it's one of the few sports where there is room for all members of the family to participate. From young to old, we encourage the entire family to experience this unique and colorful period of our nation's heritage."

GETTING STARTED

There are three basic components needed to get a start in this sport: 19th Century-designed guns and clothing, an alias, and a good attitude which the founders refer to as "the spirit of the game." Anyone can buy a good rig and choose a clever alias, but having the right attitude is as important as the clothes you wear and the gun you shoot.

Cowboy Action Shooting is a sport that emphasizes the temporary embracement of a lifestyle as much as it promotes an exciting shooting competition. Sure, they keep score



Michael "Mad Dog Too" Harris demonstrates the quickest way to empty a double-barrel shotgun. As back-up to the shotgun, he carries a second generation Colt Single-Action Army.

1897, or 1997?

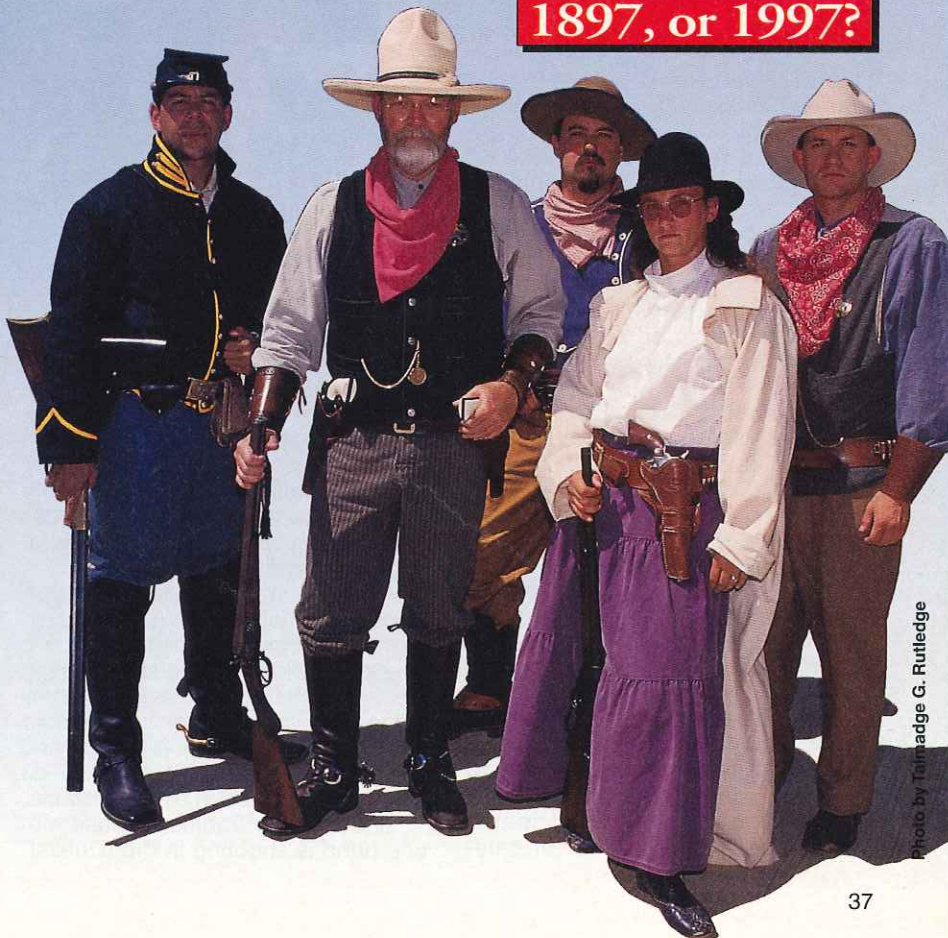


Photo by Timadge G. Rutledge

COWBOY ACTION SHOOTING

and award trophies at the end of the matches, but you won't see break-neck rivalries here. Everyone is cordial, helpful, and glad to see you. What truly makes Cowboy Action Shooting such a fun event is that everyone is "family" for the weekend and everyone is a winner come sundown Sunday.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Clothing Makes the Person: Period-looking Western attire is encouraged. In fact, it's pretty much required. The idea is to fully immerse yourself in the spirit of the game. That means you can choose to dress like a cowboy (1865-1916) or like a B-Western movie star from the 1930s-'50s. Either way, you should look the part.

An easy way to start is to remove the belt loops from an old pair of button-fly jeans and sew on some suspender buttons. A tab collar shirt from a local thrift store and a beat up cowboy hat shouldn't prove too hard to find. And, of course, you'll need cowboy boots or some approximation thereof (sneakers are a no-no). Once you get active in the sport, you can "upgrade" your threads to enhance your authenticity.

Your outfit helps determine, and is determined by, your "impression." Your impression is your inhabiting of the character you have selected or created. You may fancy yourself a gunfighter, marshal, cowboy or cowgirl, gambler, scout, Native American, mountain man or woman, cavalry soldier, preacher, travelling medicine man, etc. You create an alter ego, assume his/her identity (complete with alias), dress accordingly, and stay in character for the length of the event. If you have a favorite Western movie character, you may outfit yourself similarly and take on that role.

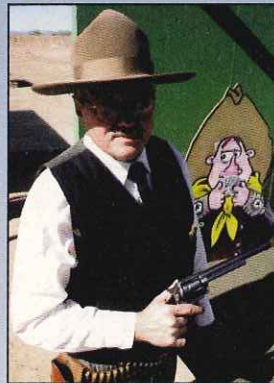
Numerous outfitters, all called "Sutlers," set up tents where they sell their goods during a shoot. At "Sutlers' Row" you can find entire outfits or just that little something that you needed to complete your impression.

Classifications: A Cowboy Action Shoot is comprised of a number of "stages." Each stage requires at least one single action revolver, a rifle, and a shotgun. Participants can compete in a number of cate-

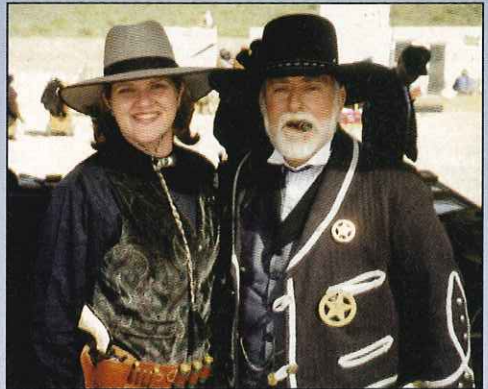


Above, W.J. Williams of Willis, Texas, "deals with three bad guys" with his lever action rifle.

Right: Michael "Mad Dog Too" Harris works the action of his engraved Navy Arms 1866 Yellow Boy carbine.



Robert "The Major" Stutler with his Ruger Vaquero. It's nothing but Rugers for The Major, and rightfully so; he is the General Manager for all Sturm, Ruger & Co. operations in Arizona.



Harper "Judge Roy Bean" Creigh, SASS badge #1, founder of the Single Action Shooting Society, here with Mary Beth "101 Inez" Daley.

gories: Modern, Traditional, Frontier Cartridge (Blackpowder), Duelist, and Frontiersman.

The "Modern" category requires that the shooter use "any full-sized single-action cartridge revolver of at least .32 caliber having adjustable sights." This means that the Ruger Blackhawk you have sitting around somewhere will do just fine.

A "Traditional" shooter uses the same guns that the real (or reel) cowboys used back in those rip-roaring days of the Old West. Any single-action revolver, whether percussion or cartridge, that was manufactured before 1896, or is a reproduction thereof, and of at least .32 caliber, is allowed—as long as the sights are non-adjustable.

Shooting the Traditional class with one hand is shooting in the "Duelist"

category. Here you must use your shooting hand to cock the revolver for each shot.

"Frontier Cartridge" has the same requirements as Traditional, except all cartridges must have blackpowder as the propellant and use at least a .36 caliber bullet. Restrict the Frontier Cartridge category to just percussion revolvers and you have the criteria for the "Frontiersman" category.

SHOOTERS

The Old West was not populated exclusively by men and neither is Cowboy Action Shooting. Women are welcome and aren't restricted to the "school marm" role of some old movies. On the contrary, female Cowboy Action Shooting participants are more like Annie Oakley! They par-

FIREARMS, AMMUNITION & AMMUNITION COMPONENTS

Photo by Talmadge G. Rutledge



Navy Arms
Dept. AG
689 Bergen Blvd.
Ridgefield, NJ 07657

Peacemaker Specialists
Dept. AG
P.O. Box 157
Whitmore, CA 96096

R&D Guns
Dept. AG
RR 1, Bopx 283
Beloit, WI 53511

Ray Meibaum
Dept. AG
Box 524
Florissant, MO 63033

Remington Arms Co., Inc.
Dept. AG
1011 Centre Rd., 2nd Floor
Wilmington, DE 19805-1270

Sturm, Ruger, & Co.
Dept. AG
283 Lacey Place
Southport, CT 06940

3-D Ammunition & Bullets
Dept. AG
112 W. Plum St.
Doniphan, NE 68832

Tristar
Dept. AG
P.O. Box 7496
N. Kansas City, MO 64116

Uberty USA, Inc.
Dept. AG
P.O. Box 509
Lakeville, CT 06039

U.S. Repeating Arms Co., Inc.
Dept. AG
275 Winchester Ave.
Morgan, UT 84050-9333

Winchester Ammunition
Dept. AG
427 Shamrock Ave.
East Alton, IL 62024

Black Hills Ammunition, Inc.
Dept. AG
P.O. Box 3090
Rapid City, SD 57709

Bull-X, Incorporated
Dept. AG
520 North Main
Farmer City, IL 61842

Cimarron F.A. Co.
Dept. AG
P.O. Box 906
Fredericksburg, TX 78624

Colt's Manufacturing Co.
Dept. AG
P.O. Box 1868
Hartford, CT 06144

Dixie Gunworks
Dept. AG
P.O. Box 130
Union City, TN 38281

Double A Ltd.
Dept. AG
P.O. Box 11306
Minneapolis, MN 55411

EMF
Dept. AG
1900 E. Warner Ave., #1-D
Santa Ana, CA 92705

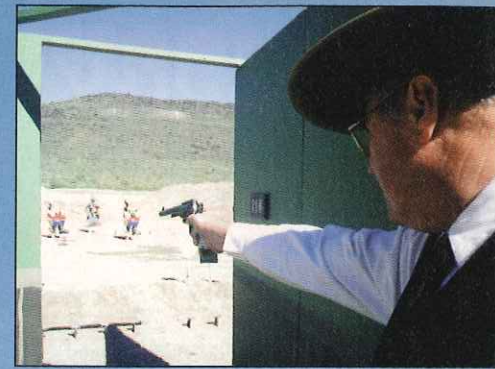
Federal Cartridge Co.
Dept. AG
900 Ehlen Dr.
Anoka, MN 55303

John Gren
Dept. AG
N. 6403 Howard Street
Spokane, WA 99208

Interarms (Rossi Importers)
Dept. AG
Box 208
Alexandria, VA 22313

Marlin Firearms Co., Inc.
Dept. AG
100 Kenna Place
New Haven CT 06473

Munden Enterprises
Dept. AG
1621 Sampson St.
Butte, MT 59701



In the "Duelist" category, Robert "The Major" Stutler, shoots his single-action Ruger Vaquero one-handed.



Josie Marcus of San Rafael, California aims her .45 caliber EMF Hartford.

pete against only those in your division. This promotes greater family participation, ensures fairness, and means that many more trophies are up for grabs.

SHOOTING IRONS

As far as shooting irons are concerned, as an avid Cowboy Action Shooting participant I have had the good fortune to try much of what is available. Here are some of my observations.

Before you buy any firearm for Cowboy Action Shooting, check with SASS or obtain the SASS handbook to make sure that what you have your eye on is "legal" for SASS competition. Just because a gun is old and was around "way back when" doesn't mean that it's currently allowed in competition.

An example: a favorite rifle of the Texas and Arizona Rangers was the 1895 Winchester lever action. Though volumes of photographs speak to the popularity of the gun in the Old West, it is not allowed in competition for two reasons. One, it was made only in high-power calibers. Two, it has a box magazine. SASS requires that rifles be single-shot or have the traditional tubular under-the-barrel magazine.

Participants in the Cowboy Mounted Shooting events must navigate an obstacle course and shoot the balloon targets. Their guns shoot pistol cartridges that have been loaded with cornmeal.



A Cowboy Mounted Shooter receives accolades from his fellow competitors.

ticipate in the same stages and shoot the guns of their choice from the same distances as the men. The same goes for young shooters, male and female, twelve and over. Additionally, for those over 60, there is a Seniors' division.

Everyone shoots alongside everyone else, but you actually com-



COWBOY ACTION SHOOTING

THE RIGHT AMMO

SASS has some restrictions on the ammunition you can use in competition. For safety and target considerations, as well as authenticity guidelines, all revolver ammo must have a muzzle velocity of between 650 and 1000 feet per second. Bullets must be all lead. No jacketed, copper washed, plated, or gas-checked ammo is allowed.

Black Hills, Hornady, Navy Arms, 3-D, and Winchester are among those manufacturers offering ammo designed specifically for Cowboy Action Shooting events and that meets all SASS standards. Some "new" cowboy ammo even comes packaged in period-style boxes.

ANTIQUÉ FIREARMS

Original firearms are permissible in Cowboy Action Shooting, but using them is not always a good idea. Guns that old are very valuable and often rather fragile. They make better show pieces than competition pieces. If you feel compelled to use an original 19th Century firearm in a match (or for any



Michael "Mad Dog Too" Harris prepares to load his .45-70 1885 Browning rifle for a long-range side match.

reason), first have it checked by a competent gunsmith to be sure it is in safe firing condition.

Another reason not to shoot an original firearm of this period until you've had a qualified gunsmith check the gun is that the type of gunpowder changed dramatically during the 1800s. Blackpowder and blackpowder cartridges, though available even today, gradually were replaced by cartridges using smokeless pow-

APPAREL			
Amazon Drygoods Dept. AG 2218 East 11th St. Davenport, IA 52803	Catalena Hatters Dept. AG 203 N. Main Bryan, TX 77803	M. J. Cahn Co., Inc. Dept. AG 510 West 27th St. New York, NY 10001 (fabric)	
Buffalo Runner Dept. AG 107 South Bridge St. P.O. Box 242 Henrietta, TX 76365	COWS Dept. AG 6005 Balcones Court El Paso, TX 79912	Mackey Custom Hats Dept. AG 1485 Ward Road Bozeman, MT 59715	
			Miller's Millinery Dept. AG P.O. Box 8077 Lancaster, PA 17604-8077
			Plum Crick Stitchin' Dept. AG Rt. 1 Box 93A Dexter, KS 67038
			Spotted Pony Traders Dept. AG 8451 Ravenna Avenue Louisville, OH 44641
Trail's End Dept. AG 10565 Lyon Road Erie, KS 66733			

Winter Range '97.

der. You must not use smokeless powder in a gun that was designed for blackpowder. The newer propellant is more powerful and, in a blackpowder gun, can cause a burst barrel and possible injury to the shooter or those nearby.

Antique Damascus-barreled guns, while often beautiful, should not be used in competition nor fired at all. The steel or iron used in their manufacture typically wasn't very strong or durable to begin with and age will have no doubt contributed to their fragility.

SINGLE-ACTION REVOLVERS

They say you can't improve upon perfection, and I believe it. Case in point: Few guns have ever fit my hand and felt so-o-o natural as does the 1873 Colt Single Action Army (SAA) revolver, a.k.a. the Peacemaker. My Peacemaker's 4³/₄" barrel in .45 caliber seems to be a flawless extension of not only my arm, but my mind as well. Bullets go not only where I hoped they would, but also where I knew they would.

Genuine Colts are wonderful guns and are readily available. However, for shooters with budgetary constraints, Uberti, EMF, Cimarron, Navy Arms, and others all make wonderfully detailed replicas of the Single Action Army, often for a fraction of the cost of an actual Colt. These replicas are made with such accuracy that many of their parts interchange with the Colt originals.

These companies also reproduce such classic 19th Century revolvers as the Remington 1875, the Colt Bisley and the Schofield, as well as

numerous blackpowder replica guns. R & D Gun Shop of Beloit, Wisconsin, and John Gren of Spokane, Washington, even make blackpowder-only replicas of the Colt conversions of 1867-1873. These were percussion guns (muzzleloaders) converted to fire cartridges in the years following the Civil War.

Of course, while the Single Action Army is a terrific choice for Cowboy Action Shooting, it may not be your choice. What works best for me is not necessarily what works best for other shooters. Indeed, if the Peacemaker were the perfect gun for everyone, there wouldn't be such a wide variety of single-action firearms available to the Cowboy Action Shooter.

Two other extremely popular guns in CAS are the Vaquero and the Bisley Vaquero, both from Ruger. The latter has the more pronounced Bisley target grip contour. Based on the famed Ruger Blackhawks, the Vaqueros differ from their predecessors most noticeably by having fixed sights and sleeker, more classically 19th Century lines. Like all Rugers, Vaqueros have proven quite sturdy.

RIFLES & SHOTGUNS

A number of events will call for the use of a rifle or shotgun. SASS guidelines govern the types of longarms you can select, too. Generally speaking, rifles should be of a pistol caliber, open-sighted, lever or slide-action, tube-fed or single shot, and manufactured before 1899 (or a replica thereof). Shotguns should be side by side, lever or a pump with exposed hammer.

Several manufacturers are now offering reproductions of popular 19th

Century longarms suitable for Cowboy Action Shooting. Tristar Sporting Arms of Kansas City, Missouri, is making available Winchester 1887 and 1901 lever-action shotguns. Marlin, EMF, and Rossi are all introducing new replica rifles for 1997. Navy Arms is marketing reproductions of the Winchester 1892 carbine and the 1873 Springfield Trapdoor carbine.

Winchester itself is re-introducing its classic 1892 in both rifle and carbine. The smaller-framed cousin of the famous Winchester 1894, the 1892 rifle was actually John Wayne's longarm of choice for most of his movie career. A new version of the 1894 called the Trails End combines the original buckhorn-style open sights with a chambering in .45 Colt

authoritative book on Western gunleather, *Packing Iron*. If you're looking for a home for that LeMat revolver or a scabbard for your Schofield, either of these companies can accommodate you.

Galco International, Ltd., the Phoenix, Arizona, holster and leather giant, now offers a complete catalogue of fine cowboy gunleather. American Sales and Kirkpatrick are also noted for their high-quality Western gunleather.

SHOOTING A STAGED MATCH

There is considerable variation in how a Cowboy Action Shooting match is set up. Each organizer has some leeway in how to compose the scenarios. Most often, the course is decorated like a stage set to give the

ed position at a card table or mounted on an ersatz horse among other possibilities.

The shooters have directions to follow that stipulate how they must begin a shooting sequence (sitting at a card table, standing, mounted, etc.) and how they must proceed, including which gun to use when. In some events in which a movie scene is being recreated, a shooter may be required to repeat a line of dialogue (example: "This town ain't big enough for the both of us!") before commencing firing.

Some scenarios require only handguns, while others require some combination of handgun, rifle and/or shotgun. The shooter has to engage the "bad guys" in the scenario in the manner prescribed by the instructions. Scoring is determined by a

GUNLEATHER & COWBOY ACCESSORIES

Alfonso's of Hollywood
Dept. AG
P.O. Box 9157
No. Hollywood, CA 91609

American Sales
& Kirkpatrick
Dept. AG
P.O. Box 677
Laredo, TX 78042

Arntzen Corporation
Dept. AG
Rockford, IL 61105-0898
(steel targets)

Bianchi International
Dept. AG
100 Calle Cortez
Temecula, CA 92590
909-676-5621

D.B. Southwest Leather Co.
Dept. AG
P.O. Box 1857
Lakeside, CA 92040

Dillon Precision Products
Dept. AG
8009 E. Dillon's Way
Scottsdale, AZ 85260-9865

Double-R Saddle Co.
Dept. AG
Rt. 1 Box 97
Jones, OK 73049

Frontier Gunleather
Dept. AG
P.O. Box 2038
Rancho Mirage, CA
92270

Galco International, Ltd.
Dept. AG
2019 W. Quail Avenue
Phoenix, AZ 85027

JLM Shooter's Supply
Dept. AG
276 Hwy 6
Waukee, IA 50263

Moss Saddlery
Dept. AG
608 N. Belmont Street
Richmond, VA 23221

Pullman Saddle Co.
Dept. AG
P.O. Box 567
New Palestine, IN 46163

Ron Kibler Saddlery
Dept. AG
9020 Vann's Tavern Rd.
Gainesville, GA 30506

S. R. Kerlin
Dept. AG
P.O. Box 24266
GMF, Barrigada
Guam 96921

Tucker Custom Leather
Dept. AG
2026 Karbach Suite 2
Houston, TX 77092

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San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675

shooter's raw time plus five seconds for each miss and ten seconds for shooting targets out of the designated sequence. While the targets are generously sized, shooting them quickly within the context of the setting can offer a real challenge.

At my first match, I was persuaded to participate (though I had planned only to observe). However, once I tried it I realized that the competition was not "competition" in the traditional sense. It is an enjoyable, low-stress game with the timekeepers and scores adding only interest and structure. Cowboy Action Shooting is fun from the outset.

At most SASS events, prizes go to shooters just for participating, and raffles can send the lowest-scoring shooter home with a super prize (even a new gun!). Some folks take home trophies, but the competitiveness is never obtrusive or unpleasant. The sport is simply full of great people and great friends having a great time.

If you'd like more information on getting involved in Cowboy Action Shooting, write the Single Action Shooting Society at Dept. AG, 1938 N. Batavia, Suite M, Orange, CA 92865. They can send you the rules and membership information, and also tell you when the next match takes place in your area.



The Tejas Pistoleros of Houston, Texas. Winter Range '96.

and is a handsome addition to the period originals.

LEATHER

Belt and holster manufacturers have wasted no time in recognizing this new sport. S. R. Kerlin of Guam and Moss Saddlery of Richmond, Virginia, have each introduced a full line of cowboy leather goods, featuring exact reproductions of some of the more interesting designs found in Richard Rattenbury's

suggestion, if not the literal look, of a Western setting. There may be saloon facades, storefronts, card tables, fence rails, hay bales, or "horses" often made by mounting saddles on oil drums. A marked loading area is set up away from the firing line. Targets may be made of cardboard silhouettes, plastic foam, steel plates, bowling pins, or just about anything else.

Shooters may be required to begin a shooting stage from a seat-