

Event draws gunslingers from all over

RUFFIN PREVOST Gazette Wyoming Bureau

Jun 11, 2010



Sean Bolli, dressed in the period costume of a Cossack soldier, traveled from Calgary, Canada to compete Friday in Cody's Wild West Shootout. RUFFIN PREVOST/Gazette Staff

RUFFIN PREVOST Gazette Wyoming Bureau

CODY — It was a cold and dreary morning Friday when Belle Drewry started shooting at the train, but her two revolvers slung hot lead. By the time she had emptied them, along with her rifle and a shotgun, Drewry had taken out more than two dozen cowboys in less than a minute.

Luckily for Drewry, whose real name is Kari Hardy, the train was imaginary and the cowboy targets were steel silhouettes.

The “train robbery” was one of 10 scenarios set up for participants in Cody’s Wild West Shootout, an event that combines shooting, history and role playing in a highly social activity enjoyed by thousands of competitors around the world.

“It’s just a gas,” said Hardy, who works for a Cheyenne restaurant equipment firm. “The people you get to meet are great, and they come from all over.”

Hardy and more than 85 others, including shooters from New Zealand and Canada, are competing this weekend in the Wyoming Cowboy Action Shooting championship match. Participants must wear period costumes reflecting Old West styles from 1860 to 1899, and must use guns from the same era.

People are also reading...

- 1 **Full Court Press: Montana high school basketball highlights (Feb. 24)**
 - 2 **Why man died in Billings ditch still unknown**
 - 3 **Teen arrested on suspicion of 2023 South Side homicide**
 - 4 **Steven (Scott) Pekovich**
-

They compete individually in different Western-themed scenarios, or stages, firing pistols, rifles and shotguns in specific sequences at multiple targets. The fastest time wins, with penalties imposed for missed shots or other mistakes. Top finishers are often separated by only fractions of a second.

“It’s a fun sport. There are no professional shooters, and there are no cash prizes. So everyone just shoots for bragging rights, or maybe a certificate,” said match director Rudy LaCroix, who uses the alias “Joe Cross” in competition.

All shooters adopt an Old West persona, based on a historical figure or a fictional character. Shooters must use their aliases during contests, with the 85,000-member Single-Action Shooting Society acting as sanctioning body and alias registry.

In a sport where independent-minded gunslingers use live ammunition, the society makes sure each competitor uses a unique alias, lest a deadly feud erupt over who gets to be Wyatt Earp, Billy the Kid or Buffalo Bill Cody.

“I always wanted to be a saloon girl, so that’s why I chose Belle,” Hardy said of her alias, Belle Drewry.

Buried in Cody’s Old Trail Town, Drewry was a beloved “soiled dove,” a prostitute from the bloody Park County frontier town of Arland, no longer standing on its original site near Meeteetse.

“People enjoy the history and love getting dressed up. For some of us, it’s all about the clothes,” said Barbara Schofield-Hallgren, a competitor from Palmdale, Calif., whose husband uses the alias “Lumpy Grits.”

Schofield-Hallgren is a descendant of Maj. George W. Schofield, a cavalry officer who improved on a Smith & Wesson .45-caliber pistol design, making it easier to reload while on horseback.

“Yellowstone Bill” was one competitor using a Schofield revolver Friday.

Better known as William Tabacinski, the retired teacher and amiable gunslinger splits his time between Cody and Arizona, traveling and living in a large camper “along with my 37 guns, two cats and one wife.”

Like many of the couples at the event, Tabacinski and his wife, two-time Wyoming champion “Six-Gun Annie,” compete together at the same shooting contests. And like most other competitors, they are over 50 and have the time and money to devote to an activity that requires a high level of commitment.

“It’s not a cheap sport,” Tabacinski said. “You need two pistols, a rifle and a shotgun just to get started, plus the costume.”

Younger shooters are also rare, he figures, because they didn't grow up as immersed in Western films, TV shows and music as part of their daily pop culture diet.

But for the many young-at-heart retirees who compete, their grandchildren are proving to be willing recruits to the sport, Tabacinski said.

"It's a way to be safe and still indulge in our fantasies of being a cowboy, shooting real ammo and doing this kind of stuff. And the grandparents have the time to devote to get the grandkids into it," he said.

Hardy, the defending Wyoming women's champ, got into the sport eight years ago as a way to spend time with her son, then 13.

While it is competitive, Cowboy Action Shooting is also highly social, with participants offering friendly advice and pointers at every turn.

Hardy met her husband, "Louisiana Lightnin'," at a shooting event. Defending Wyoming champion Chris Hardy proposed to her at a match, and the two were married five years ago in New Mexico at the national finals.

"I go to these big matches looking forward to the people I know I'm going to see there," she said.












Hardy was not a crack shot when she started, so she focused more on her costume in those early days, sporting a fancy dress with a bustle, ruffles and feathers. Now, Hardy wears the more utilitarian outfit of a wrangler, allowing her to move and shoot more freely.

Becoming a good shooter takes practice and dedication, she said.

"You have to focus. And slow down. When you slow down, you actually shoot faster and you're cleaner. You make fewer mistakes," Hardy said.

Contact Ruffin Prevost at rprevost@billingsgazette.com or 307-527-7250.

Popular in the Community

<p>Rosendale rejects affair allegation</p> <p> ICARE Today 4h</p> <p>Well that's just gross! How dare you accuse some 20 year old...</p> <p> Top Comment  9</p>	<p>Letter to the editor: Why do Montana leaders still suppo...</p> <p> Basil Fawly 18 Feb</p> <p>Thank you for your excellent letter to the editor.When Trump...</p> <p> Top Comment  14</p>	<p>Montana Republican leaders split following Rosendale's...</p> <p> John Foster 3d</p> <p>If Republicans take the Senate will it run as smoothly as the...</p> <p> Top Comment  2</p>	<p>Letter to the editc exposes prioritie</p> <p> Rbimd 12h</p> <p>You do realize, Gray corporate profits are</p> <p> Top Comment</p>
--	---	---	--