

THE SWEET VOICE

"Sugar Ray" Quinn Talks the Talk in Mounted Shooting

By Mark Boardman

It takes a real Cowboy to go by the handle "Sugar." And there's no doubt, Ray Quinn is Cowboy through and through.

Okay, so he doesn't shoot in competition. He rarely rides a horse. Still, "Sugar Ray" is as much a part of mounted shooting as just about anybody you can mention. And he's proud of that.

Learning to Talk, for Fun and Profit.

The South Dakotan was pretty much born to use his voice, imitating the announcers he heard on radio or saw on TV while he was growing up. "I have a broadcast journalism degree from South Dakota State," he says. "I always knew I was going to do something with my voice, I just didn't know which way I'd be going."

Maybe it should have been obvious to him. Because at the same time he was thinking "announcer," Ray was working arenas: "I came up through the ranks of rodeo. I fought bulls for 12 years. I was a professional rodeo clown and bullfighter."

Those are tough jobs, and that kind of rodeo career is usually pretty short (especially when you get a family). So he started doing some rodeo announcing about 11 years ago. Ray got good at it; the word got out, and he became a man in demand.

A Voice for Mounted Shooting.

In 2000, Quinn was introduced to mounted shooting when he was asked to do a shoot in the Black Hills. "I told them, 'You know, I don't know anything about your sport; I don't know anything about what you guys do. You might want to try and get somebody else.'" For once, people didn't listen to him—the organizers hired him in spite of all that.



"Sugar Ray" Quinn

Ray got into the spirit of things right away, and had a lot of fun in the new sport. He also got to know quite a few movers and shakers at that first match, including the Plasters, the Carrs, the Kukas, the Littles, the Olsons. Those relationships grew and developed over the years. Quinn admits that he was hooked.

And before he knew it, he was working a regular schedule of mounted shooting events.

Within a few years, CMSA was using him at several of the major matches. And the offers kept coming.

Nothing wrong with that. But it means that "Sugar Ray" does up to 30 weekend events per year—mounted shooting, rodeo, even stock car races. And that doesn't even take into account his day job; he works for a paper and chemical company in South Dakota. "People ask me

what I do for a living, and I tell them, 'I sell toilet paper.'"

Those Who Can, Do. Those Who Can't, Announce.

Ray is very open about it: he may love mounted shooting, but that doesn't mean he's going to compete. "Last year, Chad Little challenged me that if he won the Eastern United States Championship that I'd get on his horse and shoot at the World finals in Vegas. I've been on less than 10 horses in my entire life. So he won the Easterns. And I got up on Ricochet but I didn't shoot—I told Chad, 'I don't think you want your horse shot. So let's just ride.'"

And while Ray allows that he might try it again—in some small, private place—he just doesn't have the time at the shoots he works to get up on a horse. "I fly in late Tuesday night. Go to work Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. I hop on a plane late Sunday or early Monday morning. And that gets repeated, especially during the summer months. I don't get to see much of the places I go to."

Announcing is about as glamorous as, say, selling toilet paper. Well, not exactly. But it's long hours and hard work. Ray says the key is preparation: "Doing your homework. Knowing the people. The thing is, you get a new name, you get a new area of the country where somebody's from, the worst thing you can do to a shooter is say their name wrong, where they're from wrong. I don't know everything, but I have notes up there with me."

A Matter of Style.

That kind of preparation allows Quinn to inject some personality and style into his announcing. In the world of mounted shooting, he's best known for the nicknames he straps on some of the competitors. "I've been giving nicknames for as long as I can remember. Some of them don't really make sense. I call Chad Little 'Hollywood' because he's so non-Hollywood. I don't give everyone nicknames. You've got to earn them."

Many of us are still trying to earn them...

What's Ahead?

Ask Ray what's in the future, and he's not certain—at least beyond the gigs he's already booked for. He'd love to be able to do rodeo announcing full time, if possible. Or find some other way to use his love of sports and vocal prowess to make a living.

But for right now, he's pretty satisfied with life. And why not—how many real Cowboys go by the handle "Sugar"? 🐾



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