

60

Racegunning with Jessie

By Robin Taylor, USPSA Staff (copyright 2010)
Photos by Roger Maier

Young, beautiful, and supremely skilled, 24-year-old Jessie Abbate has turned ladies' practical shooting on its ear since coming onto the set in 2006. The black-clad angel from Glock has won every title in sight, becoming one of few true "professionals." Her soft voice, gentle demeanor, and Georgia accent seem out of place, but this cheerleader and ex-"girly-girl" is fierce.

"Jessie is on a whole new curve relative to my generation, it's a true profession for her," says USPSA great Lisa Munson.

A junior at Clayton State University, Abbate splits her time between home, school and shooting professionally.

"Shooting is my job," she says matter-of-factly. "I live for guns. Four to five days a week I'm training, or doing something shooting-related....Other than that I'm what most people consider a housewife, which is certainly a full-time job in itself."

Abbate got her start as a cowboy shooter before switching to modern firearms. That's no surprise, as she's the daughter of Five-Time SASS World Champion Clyde Harrison – better known as "Easy Rider."

"We've got baby pictures of me at the range with him, and I'm not walking yet," she laughs.

Though she wasn't particularly interested in "the gun thing," she tagged along until she finally got bitten by the shooting bug at age 15.

Nine years later, to understand Jessie, you have to understand a little bit about what I call "Team Abbate."

In the NASCAR world, there are sponsors, and there are racing organizations. If you own a large soft-drink firm, and you want to get involved in NASCAR, you don't run out and buy a car. Instead, you have a sit-down with a group like Joe Gibbs' Racing. They manage race teams, including drivers, support staff, race management, AND cars.

"Team Abbate" looks a bit like Joe Gibbs Racing. Billy Abbate is a driver in his own right (for Atlanta Arms & Ammo), and acts like an owner/manager. He flies his personal aircraft cross-country to matches, taking the entire team along for the ride. He's the pilot, coach to Jessie, decision-maker, and until recently, agent.

Jessie's father races with the team, as do Canadian master Ken Kupsch, USPSA and SASS Champion Randi Rogers (Glock), Bianchi Cup specialist

Jason Koon, and Randi's protégé Tori Nonaka. Glock's David Sevigny also trains with them from time to time. It's this combination of people, all champions and Grand Masters, pooling their skills and resources to work together that makes "Team Abbate" such a force.

For those of you who think you shoot a lot, consider this: Jessie's personal ammo consumption hit "about 60,000 rounds" last year, not counting rimfire ammo. She competed in "18 to 20" major tournaments in 2009, along with dozens of smaller local events. Together, those "half a dozen" people burned roughly a quarter-million rounds and spent perhaps \$20,000 in match fees alone last year. Travel costs double or triple that. Each is using/consuming multiple firearms, each tweaked to win specific games. Keeping that effort going demands support.

Jessie just signed with August Sports Promotions, which takes some of the load off of Billy, and "brings a level of professionalism that really needs to be there," says Jessie (See jessieabbate.com). Jessie's mother Sherry Harrison occupies a large support role both at home and on the road. "She has always supported me, no matter what road I have taken. Even though she works behind the scenes, she is just as much a part of my success as my husband and father are," says Jessie.

I've written profiles about shooting pros for many years, and one of the questions I always ask is: "What makes you so good?"

Jessie Abbate won't "toot her own horn." She talks about drills the group is doing, and says things like, "We always start out shooting groups."

That her answers include "we" and "the group" reveals her strength. Jessie is strong-willed and talented, yes, but her "secret" is who she surrounds herself with.

As she puts it: "The more you surround yourself with good people, the more of a good person you become. The same applies in shooting, the more you surround yourself with good shooters, the more you learn, and the better shooter you become."

Jessie's world is filled to the brim with top-flight shooters, all with high work ethics, positive attitudes and high standards. It's a perfect incubator for a champion racer like Jessie, and one with potential to feed/fuel a stable of champions for years to come.

