

HOLIDAY GIFTS FROM EQUESTRIAN SMALL BUSINESSES, PG. 8
plus WINTER FEEDING TIPS, WHATEVER THE WEATHER, PG. 10

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2023
WINTER
READING LIST
With Bonus
Book Reviews





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COVER PHOTO: MORGAN HORSE BY SHELLEY PAULSON
THIS PAGE: MACMILLAN PHOTOGRAPHY



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Multimedia
Content Specialist **Kaycie Will**
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Digital Team **Abhinay Kumar, Gaurav Mangla, Sanjeev Saini, Saurabh Haldiya**

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HOME OFFICE

EG Media Investments, LLC
2222 Sedwick Road • Durham, NC 27713

SIXSAILS GROUP

Chief Executive Officer **Scott Hall**
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ELIZABETH MOWER

Galloping Toward **THE HOLIDAYS**

I can hardly believe it, but it's already time to start thinking about holiday gifts and the first snowfall, and all that that means to your horsey life. As we all know, it's better to prepare beforehand than to wait until the ground is frozen and the first major snow storm blows in to prep your barn for colder days ahead!


For your winter feeding checklist, don't miss some timely reminders that you may not have considered in Nutrition Notes. Meanwhile, if "shopping small" is important to you, we have an array of gift ideas specifically from equestrian small businesses that will let you feel good about your purchases supporting small retailers while checking off of your shopping list (pg. 8).

In a treat for the eyes, we're celebrating the fun and festive feel of the holidays with the Lebanon, Ohio carriage parade, which draws around 100,000 spectators every December (pg. 58). Kim MacMillan tells you everything you'll need to know if you're considering a visit this year, while over a dozen beautiful photos showcase equines in harness.

Finally, we have two hot topics that seem to be on many peoples' minds these days, although they couldn't be more different. One is liberty training, which has hit a huge level of popularity of late with lots of reader requests for more. Go to pg. 46 for Luke Gingerich's top advice on getting started.

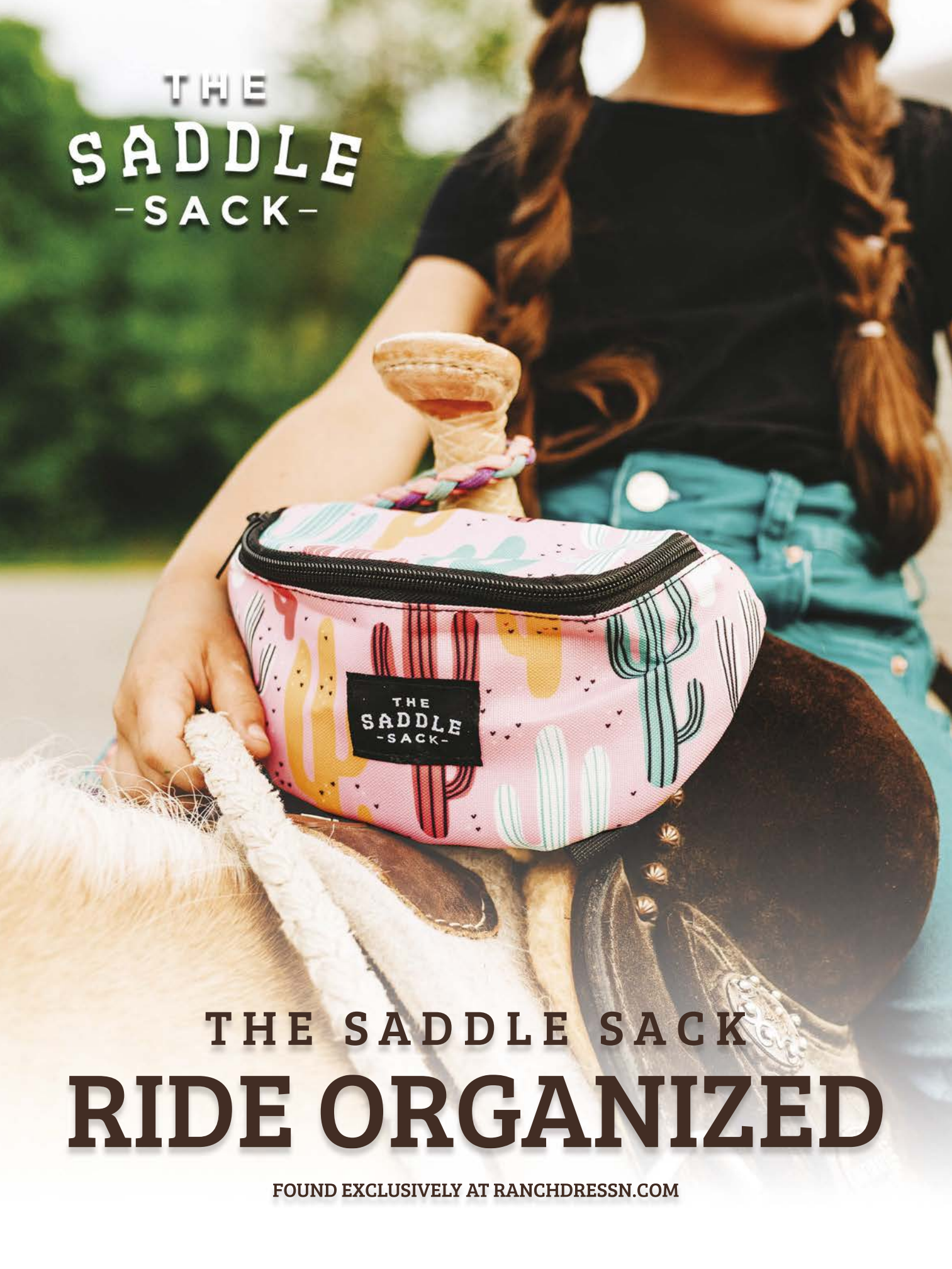
Another subject often hitting the news is the exploding number of Alzheimer's and dementia diagnoses across the nation, with one every 65 seconds. Some good news for patients and caregivers is that expanding equine-assisted therapy programs have shown incredible promise; find out more on pg. 52.

Happy reading,

Holly Caccamise 
Editor in Chief
editor@horseillustrated.com

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Dressage individual and freestyle gold medalists Charlotte Fry and Glamourdale of Great Britain. *Allen MacMillan/ MacMillan Photography*



Dancing in Denmark

While the WEG is no more, a revamped format breathes new life to the FEI World Championships.

BY KIM MACMILLAN

The Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) announced in 2019 that its world championships would be bid on individually or in smaller sport groupings by interested host cities. The all-inclusive World Equestrian Games (WEG) format that we're all familiar with—which included all FEI sports championships competing at one venue from 1990-2018—had to be abandoned due to increasing logistical challenges for potential host sites. (Reining, which was a part of the FEI World Championships

from 2002-2018, is no longer governed by the FEI.) However, the FEI World Championships will still be held every four years like WEG, two years offset from the summer Olympics, which also hosts three FEI sports.

In the first go of the new format, equestrian athletes from around the world gathered in the city of Herning, Denmark, from Aug. 5-14 for the 2022 Ecco FEI World Championships in four disciplines: dressage, para-dressage, jumping and vaulting.



Sweden's gold medal-winning show jumpers, Henrik von Eckermann and King Edward. Sarah E. Miller/MacMillan Photography

SHINING STARS

In Denmark, we saw the emergence of new superstars, including dressage gold medalist Charlotte Fry of Great Britain riding Dutch Warmblood stallion Glamourdale, who scored over 90 percent in their freestyle to join a very elite group. Jumping gold medalist Henrik von Eckermann of Sweden piloted King Edward to all clear rounds. In fact, von Eckermann and King Edward had not had a rail down in competition since early June.

A total of 458 human athletes and 379 horses from 49 nations competed. The riders and vaulters from host country Denmark made their nation proud, topping the gold medal standings with five, followed by the Netherlands and France with three each.

TEAM USA

The highlight for the U.S. Team in Denmark was stellar performances by our para-dressage athletes, who took home team bronze, Grade IV freestyle silver (Kate Shoemaker riding Quiana) and individual Grade III bronze (Rebecca Hart riding El Corona Texel). The USA's third-place finish punched their ticket for the 2024 Paris Paralympics.

Other notable achievements for the U.S. were vaulter Kimberly Palmer finishing fifth in the individual female division and the dressage team's sixth-place finish, which qualified them for the Paris Olympics.

Two U.S. jumper riders, Brian Moggre on Balou du Revention and McLain Ward on Contagious, scored well enough in the first individual round to compete in the second round, but did not move on to the individual finals. The U.S. jumping team ultimately finished

11th, and thus did not qualify for Paris, but they have another chance in next year's Santiago Pan American Games.

Although 2022 has been labeled a "rebuilding year" for the U.S. Equestrian Team in Denmark, it did give some new faces valuable time on the world stage with the goal to increase the depth of experienced team talent ahead of the Paris Olympics.

The FEI World Championships for eventing and driving take place in Italy in mid-September. The endurance championships have been put on hold.

Find complete online coverage of the 2022 FEI World Championships in Herning, Denmark, at www.horseillustrated.com/2022-denmark. ■



The U.S. Para Dressage team with their bronze medals during the awards ceremony in Denmark. Allen MacMillan/MacMillan Photography



The U.S. vaulting squad in action at the 2022 Ecco World Championships in Herning. Sarah E. Miller/MacMillan Photography



SHOP SMALL

for the holidays

Support the individuals behind these small businesses while finding the perfect gift for your horsey friend, trainer, or family member.

BY RAQUEL LYNN



STAND WITH ME JEWELRY TRAY

A ceramic catch-all with an elegant gold rim features Bettina Norton's original painting, "Stand with Me." The tray will look perfect sitting on any nightstand. It's an excellent gift for riders or horse lovers. **\$55.00; bettinanorton.com**

LOST DESERT SAGE WILD RAG

Fashionable cowgirls will love this 100% silk charmeuse wild rag; each scarf is printed and sewn by hand. The sage, rust and green wild rag features a design created by the talented Allie Falcon. Allie's spin on modern western accessories and apparel is fresh and fun.

\$42.00; alliefalcon.com



WESTERN SADDLE RING

This statement ring by Designs by Loriece features an adorable miniature western saddle with delicate details. It's made from 925 sterling silver, which is nickel-free and resistant to tarnish. It's available in any size upon request, making it another thoughtful option for gifting.

\$190.00; loriece.com



ETCHED DRINK COASTERS

Laser-etched wooden drink coasters from Equiluxe Tack are beautifully handcrafted. A set of four coasters comes in four designs: dressage, eventing, hunter/jumper and snaffle bit. The coasters come with a matching wood container with a snaffle bit accent to hold the coasters.

\$35.00; equiluxetack.com



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Grooming brushes are a practical and pretty gift, especially when they are hand-painted by The Artful Equine. Dream up any design, and Betsie will paint the brushes to your specifications.

Starting at \$63.00; etsy.com/shop/theartfulequine



EQUESTRIAN BLUE RIBBON TEA TOWEL

Absorbent white flour sack towels feature a pretty blue ribbon watercolor design by Pony Macaroni. These whimsical towels are great for the bathroom or kitchen. They come with the option to personalize using a set of initials or a farm name to add a thoughtful touch.

Starting at \$19.50; ponymacaroni.com

NEIGHS & SLEIGHS HOLIDAY CANDLE

Enjoy "the best scents of the holidays" with notes of cranberry, cinnamon, nutmeg and holly berry. The soy wax candle comes boxed, perfect for gifting in an 11-ounce amber glass container. Candles make a great gift, and Interest Candles does an amazing job creating them for equestrians and beyond.

Starting at \$19.99; etsy.com/shop/interestcandles



HORSE THINGS SWEDISH DISHCLOTH

Eco-friendly and adorable, a Swedish dishcloth from Hunt Seat Paper Co. is a perfect gift for anyone. One biodegradable dishcloth is equivalent to 13 rolls of paper towels! The Swedish dishcloth is a thoughtful stocking-stuffer and is available in even more fun designs.

\$8.95; huntseatpaperco.com



winter FEEDING

There are a few tricky turns to navigate when feeding your horse after temperatures plunge and pastures die off.

BY HOLLY CACCAMISE

As temperatures drop, feeding your horse presents a new set of challenges. Instead of grazing all day on nutritious green grass, he'll probably be switching to a diet of hay. Many horses lose weight without access to unlimited pasture. In addition, impaction colic due to dehydration presents a very real risk. Read on to stay ahead of these risks this winter.

HAY IS FOR HORSES

Not only does hay meet your horse's forage needs, it also helps keep him warm. The process of digesting fiber in the hindgut produces tremendous amounts of heat, almost like carrying around a little wood stove. Don't believe anyone who tells you to feed corn to keep your horse warm—it doesn't!

While round-bale hay presents a convenient method of feeding many horses for a long time in the winter, be picky about quality when buying it. Many are stored outdoors, which is OK for cattle use, but hay for horses must be stored under cover to avoid mold spores that cause respiratory disease and illness.

Additionally, cattle-quality hay is very stemmy and tends to be unpalatable and wasted through trampling. Shop around for round bales that resemble your small-bale hay quality. Using a bale feeder will help prevent much of the hay from being wasted.

HAY ALTERNATIVES

If you don't have room to store hay for the entire winter and find yourself faced with a hay shortage, there are some alternatives available. Beet pulp, senior feed, hay cubes and

hay pellets are all good ways to provide forage and stretch your hay supply. Keep in mind that none of these provide long-stem forage, so start using them to stretch your hay supply before you run out completely.

VITAMINS & MINERALS

Without access to green grass, horses may become deficient in vitamins A and E, which are the first to go after grass is baled into hay and stored for long periods. A ration balancer or vitamin/mineral supplement are options to consider for winter feeding if your horse isn't fed a commercial equine grain mix, which is already fortified with vitamins and minerals.

Additionally, your horse should always have free access to salt. Since ice-cold salt blocks can become unappealing to lick, the best option is a feeder with loose salt. Horses tend to regulate their salt intake very well, and this also keeps them drinking plenty of water.

HYDRATION NATION

The most important nutrient in your horse's diet is water. Without staying properly hydrated, the contents of the intestines can dry out as they pass through, causing impaction colic. Although this is often the easiest type to resolve with a vet's assistance, every horse owner would prefer to steer clear of a case of colic.

If your temperatures regularly fall below freezing, check water troughs at least twice a day, breaking up any surface ice. Better yet, use insulated buckets or float a trough heater in the water. Although horses will drink very cold

water, they will drink more if it is in the 40 to 65-degree Fahrenheit range.

Be extra-careful about trough heater cords, making sure they're wrapped in wire or conduit so mice and horses can't nibble on them. Stick your hand in daily to check for any wayward electric current, which will stop horses from drinking immediately.

WEIGHT MAINTENANCE

Many horses shed pounds in the winter as they burn more calories to maintain their core temperature. Be prepared for this and have extra hay and grain on hand if you need to increase rations.

You may also consider switching to alfalfa hay or supplementing your grass hay with it (as opposed to adding more grain). Alfalfa boosts the calories per pound of hay, while still ensuring enough forage is in the diet.

If you are prepared for the challenges of winter feeding, you won't be taken by surprise when Mother Nature throws you a curveball this season. ■

Editor in Chief HOLLY CACCAMISE has an M.S. in animal science with a specialization in equine nutrition and exercise physiology.

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LONG ROAD to recovery

Another rescue intake has Dr. Diehl dealing with the highest of highs and the lowest of lows.

BY COURTNEY S. DIEHL, DVM

The two Mini Horses peered fearfully at me through the rails of the pen. The pen was wired shut, and several feet of packed manure was built up against the gate. It was clear that the little animals hadn't left this enclosure in a very long time.

I signaled to one of the animal control officers on scene who was looking into a dark and dismal chicken coop.

"I'm going in!" I shouted. She waved in assent, and I hoisted myself onto the shaky panels and swung a leg over the top. The Minis crowded against each other, trying to get as far away from me as possible. I spoke gently to them from my awkward perch, and soon had climbed down into the filthy pen.

The little creatures were emaciated, ribs and pelvic bones protruding from filthy and matted coats. Both had runny noses and weepy eyes, and the smaller of the two, a black mare, was coughing. I hunkered down and they turned toward me, the mare daring to stretch out her muzzle toward my hand before retreating in confusion.

Then I saw their feet. Their hooves had grown into a horrible corkscrew shape, and they limped painfully, shifting their weight from foot to foot. I concluded that this was at least several years' worth of growth.

EXAMINING THE HORSES

I was able to get a soft rope around the black mare's neck, and soon I had a halter on her. She trembled in fear but allowed me to stroke her and get a quick look at her teeth. She was only 4 years old.

I put a stethoscope on her little chest and winced as I listened to the squeaks and rattles indicative of pneumonia deep in her lungs. Her companion, a chestnut mare, had labored breathing and her eyes were dull.

I climbed out of the pen. The animal control officer, a woman named Jackie, was waiting.

"What do you think, Doc?"

I shook my head and looked sadly at the Minis, huddled together watching us.

"We've been trying to get on this property for months," Jackie said, wiping her eyes furiously. "The judge kept refusing to sign the warrant."

I felt a surge of anger. "How could anyone knowingly leave these animals in these conditions?"

Jackie shrugged. "We've had endless problems with this judge and the district attorney. If we file charges, the DA usually won't take it any further. If it does end up in court, we almost always lose, and the owners get their animals back. But that's not going to stop us from impounding every single animal on this property today."

My coworkers were already backing the horse trailer up to the pen, and I pulled out my multi-tool and started cutting the twisted wires holding the panels together. Deputies struggled with flapping chickens, and several walked by with yowling cat carriers. There were three more full-sized emaciated horses to catch and load.

At the hospital, the big horses unloaded quickly, but the Minis huddled in the trailer and refused to move. We brought an electric saw into the trailer and lopped off about 6 inches of overgrown hoof from each foot. The black mare moved gingerly on her new feet in a high stepping gait and her companion did the same. We named them Charlotte and Emily.

A LONG ROAD

Over the next few weeks, the big horses slowly began to gain weight and recover. I did everything that I could for the little horses, but I found Charlotte unconscious in her run early one morning and her faint pulse had stopped when I returned with my emergency kit.

Jackie called almost every day to check on the horses, and she broke down when I told her about Charlotte. I knew we were both think-



MARK J. BARRETT/ADOBE STOCK

ing the same thing: If only we'd gotten her out sooner. I silently cursed our idiotic system, which could cripple an entire investigation with a single flawed decision, and I knew things had to change.

Emily pined for her lost friend. The pneumonia was improving, but she was eating less and less each day. I switched her medications and added electrolytes to her feed, but nothing helped. Her heart was broken, and I feared we would lose her too.

There was a fat little donkey on the premises named Chico, who was notorious for being difficult. In desperation, we moved him next to Emily, who resolutely ignored him. Always an opportunist, Chico spied Emily's uneaten ration and stuck his head into her pen. He seized the edge of the rubber dish with his teeth and took a few gleeful bites.

That undid Emily, and she rushed Chico and fired a few kicks in his direction. Then she surprised us by taking a few bites of the feed, pinning her little ears fiercely whenever Chico got too close.

ON THE UPSWING

Emily and Chico were not exactly friends, but now Emily had a purpose in life: to get mad at Chico. Soon she began to gain weight, and her

pneumonia cleared up. Jackie stopped by to visit, and after watching them biting at each other through the panels, labeled them "frenemies."

Eventually another young Mini arrived at the facility, and she and Emily bonded immediately. They were both adopted by a lovely family that also ended up with Chico—he brayed heartbrokenly for days after the Minis left, and we begged them to take him too.

Jackie and I are drafting a series of bill proposals called Charlotte's Law. These would automatically grant emergency exceptions to search warrants for animal control officers and investigators seeking entry to a property on the grounds of animal cruelty, as well as tighten up existing laws so that skeptical DAs would have much stronger cases.

We will be seeking sponsors for our bill, and while it may never make it farther than committee review, it's comforting to try to do something more for Charlotte, whom we could not save. ■

COURTNEY S. DIEHL, DVM, has been an equine veterinarian since 2000. She is the author of *Horse Vet: Chronicles of a Mobile Veterinarian* and *Stories of Eric the Fox*, first-place winner of the CIPA EVVY award. She is currently working on her third book.

Winter

reading list

These horsey reads are sure to keep you entertained while snuggling by the fire.

BY ANNA SOCHOCKY

Oh, the weather outside is frightful, but inside it's so delightful because tea and horse books can keep you warm this holiday season. If you're on the hunt for the perfect gift for horsewomen in your life or want to assuage your own hunger for a horse book, these three books should be on your list.

THE YEAR OF THE HORSES: A MEMOIR

Shadowed by a virulent eating disorder, her brother's life-threatening illness, and her parents' divorce, author Courtney Maum leads a privileged but unsatisfying life. Years of therapy managed to unwind only part of Maum's source of trauma, however.

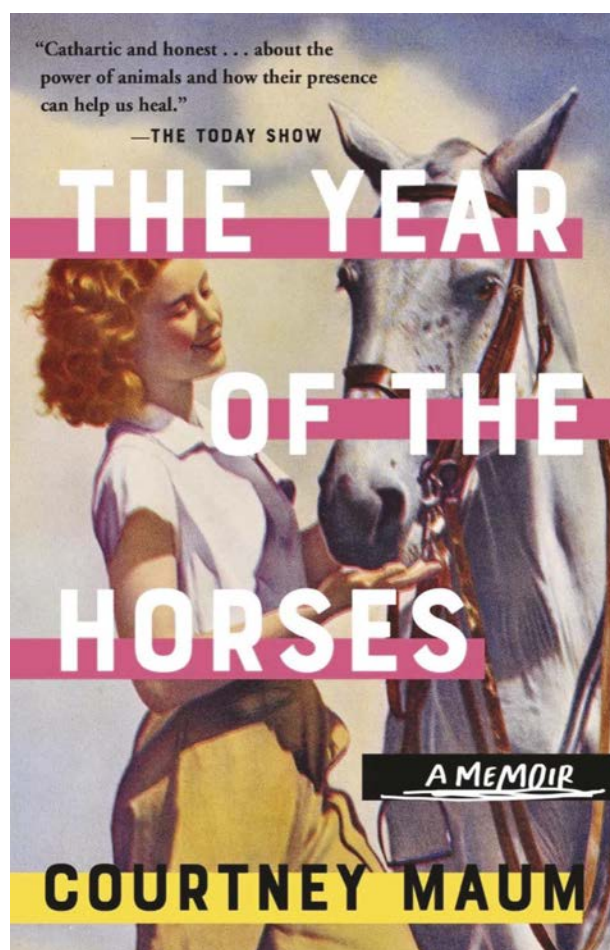
Readers of Maum's book, *The Year of the Horses: A Memoir*, perceive the solution to the author's travails long before she sees the forest for the trees on the back of a horse.

Maum refers to horses as "stealth therapy," a form of interaction long recognized as a salve for depression, anxiety, stress and trauma. Returning to her love of horses, Maum uncovers a source of healing to a point but struggles to shed her veil of perfectionism and competitiveness rooted in her privileged upbringing.

In the beginning, a return to horses serves as an escape. Maum's demons follow. Dressage lessons serve as a mirror to her obsession with perfection, and soon Maum starts chasing half-baked solutions to her physical shortcomings she alone can see.

Her daughter, Nina, becomes a sponge for Maum's neurosis, playing second fiddle to her computer and cell phone. Tensions with her husband reach a boiling point. Maum unexpectedly finds a solution in the high-octane chaos of the polo field.

Uncoordinated and more than a little fearful of the speed and contagious passion of the game, Maum's first lessons hit the skids. Her rigidity on the horse and in her body unsettled the horses she rode. Not until accepting the sage advice when her trainer said,

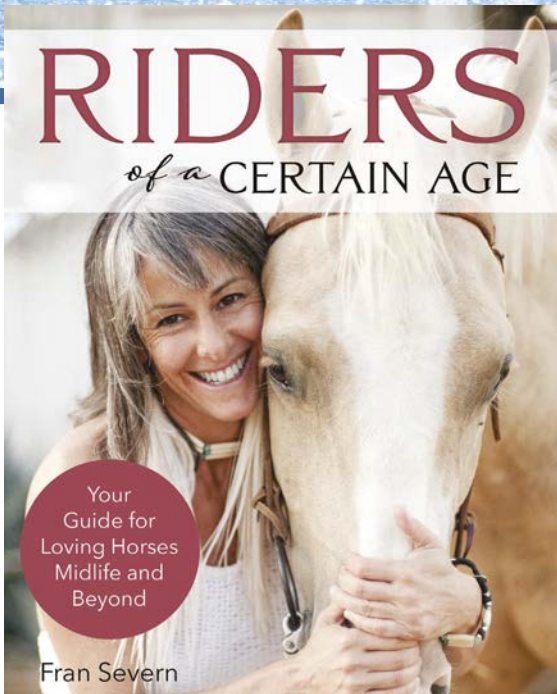


\$21.82 (hardcover); amazon.com

"These horses have blood. You have to be more open," did Maum's impenetrable walls start to crumble.

Maum weaves an honest and searing path through the detritus of her past to emerge ready to embrace her life, warts and all.

Published by Tin House, 2022



\$24.95 (paperback); horseandriderbooks.com

RIDERS OF A CERTAIN AGE

As the author, Fran Severn, surmises, “I am a rider of a certain age. I am 56 years old, but I am still my barn’s youngest rider and horse owner. Too old to be called ‘kiddo’ and not young enough to jump 4-foot fences.”

Fran Severn’s book, *Riders of a Certain Age: Your Guide for Loving Horses Midlife and Beyond* resonates with wisdom, humor, frankness, and common sense.

Severn covers every possible question nascent, middle-aged horse owners ask. How do I evaluate the credentials and teaching style of an instructor? What riding gear do I need to purchase and why? What do I do if I find myself in a barn that feels more like a junior high hallway than a stable (pun intended) environment?

As a member of the maligned Generation X, I cheered reading a book that spoke in the language of not only older horsewomen but also newcomers to life’s middle years like me.

Generation X is noted for being self-sufficient and practical. Just the facts, please. Severn understands. Menopause challenges? Check. Vision or respiratory changes? Double-check! Insurance for you and the horse—including the kind when you can’t make decisions? Check, check, check. Answering and evaluating these questions feeds into the type of horse you might buy, where to board your treasure, and most importantly, how to pay for expenses far beyond purchase, boarding, and lessons, Severn writes.

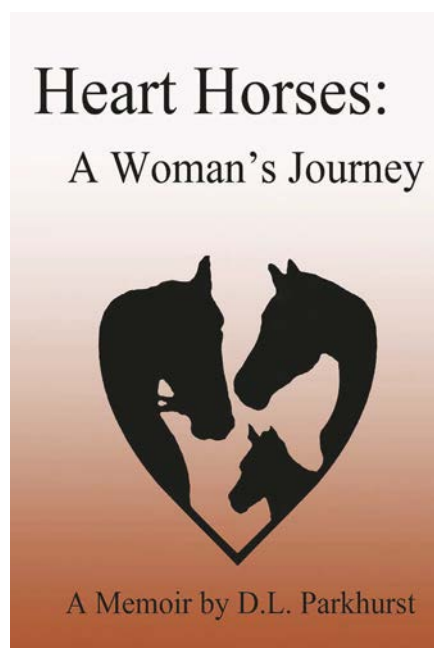
Reading like a practical manual or a conversation with a wise aunt, Severn lays out the reality of owning a horse and returning to the saddle after a long hiatus. The book is a gem for riders of any age.

Published by Trafalgar Square Books, 2022

HEART HORSES: A WOMAN’S JOURNEY

Brew a cup of tea, wrap yourself in a cozy blanket, and open Debra Parkhurst’s book, *Heart Horses: A Woman’s Journey*. Gentle and comforting, moving, and at times surprising, Parkhurst offers the reader a window into her three horses, Hannah, Legacy and Hy.

Standardbred Hannah blossoms under Parkhurst’s care when the simple acts of grooming and bathing draw the horse out of her shell. Legacy, Parkhurst’s Morgan, asserts her bossy side with Hannah after arriving home, but is full of her own surprises when she turns up pregnant. Legacy’s prodigy, Hy, was born a handful, chewing up lead lines and unlocking pasture gates. An intellectual and infectious challenge to Parkhurst, Hy’s antics bring a smile to the reader’s face.



\$19.95 (paperback); amazon.com

As with any horse story, pain and loss visit Parkhurst’s barn. Yet Parkhurst brings her three beloved horses into the present by recounting 60 years of her horse life. Parkhurst can still recall her mare Hannah’s smell; her organic storytelling breathes honesty and love for her horses.

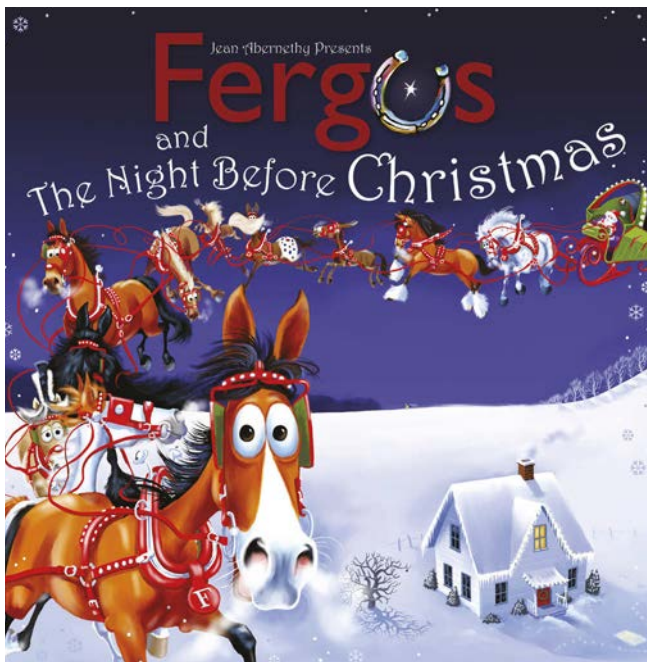
Traveling from northern Virginia to the eastern edges of Oklahoma, readers confront the complexities of building a farm fit for horses, explore the country life through the eyes of transplanted humans, and finish the book refreshed and eager to breathe in the scent of their horses, no matter the weather.

Published independently by D.L. Parkhurst, 2021 ■■

ANNA SOCHOCKY is a writer, instructor and rider based in Santa Fe, N.M. Visit her online at equi-libris.com.

Bonus Book roundup

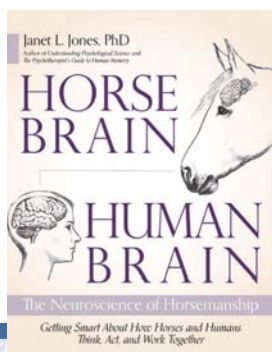
You won't run out of great reading this winter with these recent releases from Trafalgar Square Books (horseandriderbooks.com).



FERGUS AND THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

By Jean Abernethy

Fergus, the world's most popular cartoon horse, shares an epic holiday adventure as he and his motley group of equine teammates take to the skies to give St. Nick the sleigh ride of his life. **\$15.95**



HORSE BRAIN, HUMAN BRAIN

By Janet Jones, Ph.D.

Using plain language, a brain scientist and horsewoman describes human and equine brains working together and explores the differences and similarities between equine and human ways of negotiating the world. **\$26.95**

THE WORKING EQUATION TRAINING MANUAL

By Ali Kermeen

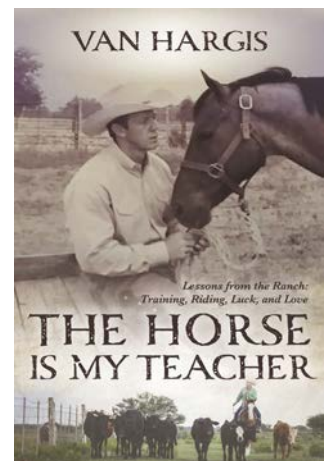
A one-of-a-kind progressive training system to those new to the sport. Lessons focus on developing confidence with the obstacle phases while incorporating dressage principles, giving riders an appealing introduction to an exciting option for adding diversity to daily training. **\$29.95**

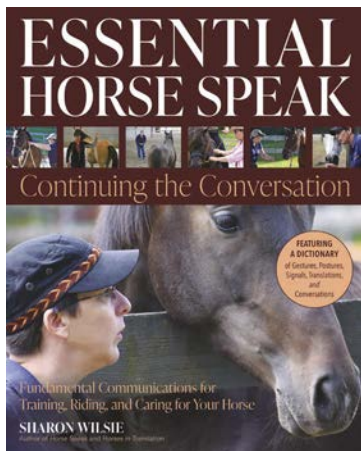


THE HORSE IS MY TEACHER

By Van Hargis

This East Texas horseman shares a collection of down-to-earth, highly relatable stories from a rural working life that impart the principles of great horsemanship while also inspiring each of us to apply those same principles to further our own personal growth and success. **\$22.95**





ESSENTIAL HORSE SPEAK: CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

By Sharon Wilsie

The most complete guide available to understanding the horse's language and knowing how to "talk" back in any training system. Includes a "Dictionary of Horse Speak" to find out what your horse is telling you and how to fix common training and behavior problems.

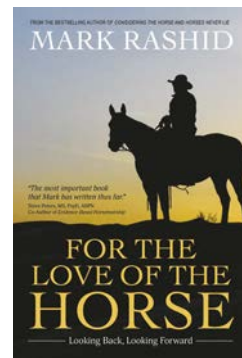
\$35.00

FOR THE LOVE OF THE HORSE

By Mark Rashid

Mark Rashid is known for delivering practical lessons in horsemanship and life in a conversational style that resonates with audiences around the world. In his new book, he finds new inroads in our attempts to become better company and fairer caregivers to horses.

\$21.95

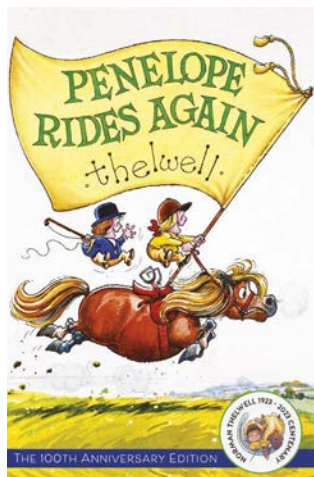


PENELOPE RIDES AGAIN

By Norman Thelwell

Many years have passed since this timeless favorite was last widely available in print. But now Thelwell's best-loved characters, the feisty Penelope and Kipper, are back in a special 100th Anniversary Edition.

\$12.95

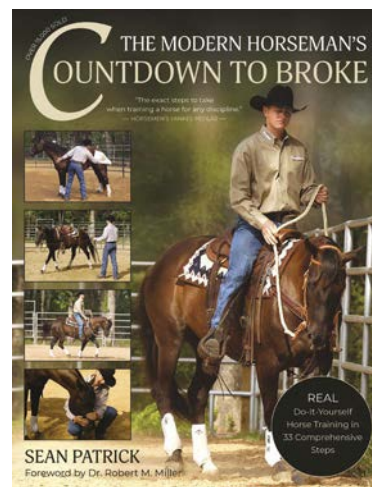


THE MODERN HORSEMAN'S COUNTDOWN TO BROKE

By Sean Patrick

This legendary countdown is the most clear, thorough, "doable" system of horse training available. Count your way down through the basic exercises—the "primary education" every horse needs in preparation for advanced work in any equestrian discipline.

\$32.95

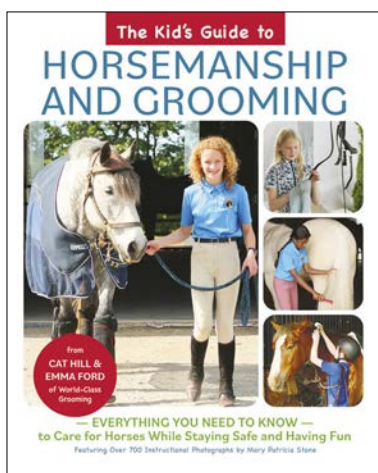


THE KID'S GUIDE TO HORSEMANSHIP AND GROOMING

By Cat Hill & Emma Ford

The most complete and correct guide available for horse-crazy kids and their families to learn basic horsemanship standards and responsibly apply them in the barn, in the arena, at home, and at competitions.

\$26.95

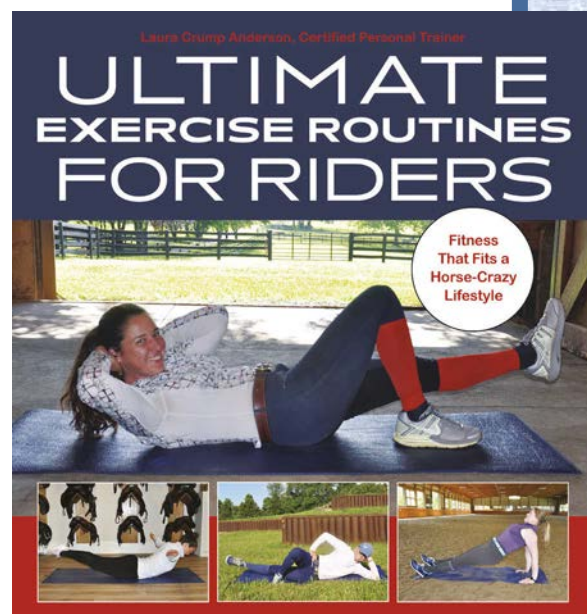


ULTIMATE EXERCISE ROUTINES FOR RIDERS

By Laura Crump Anderson

A certified personal trainer and horsewoman provides eight equestrian-specific workouts and two stretching routines to suit any rider's body, age, ability, and schedule.

\$29.95



Turning Fear INTO STRENGTH

Heaps of snow, trailering mishaps, and other wrenches in the gears help build a fearless horsewoman.

BY JUDY NAUSEEF

I haven't always been a fearless horse owner, but I've had to draw on that persona many times. I first realized that I was changing into a brave person when sitting at my desk in an office in Wisconsin watching the snow fall outside. The highlight of my day was going to the barn to ride my leased horse. As the snow accumulated, I considered the pros and cons of driving on the country roads out to the stable. My car had front-wheel drive (four-wheel drive cars were a thing of the future), and I was a good driver—so I decided to go. The horse was counting on me.

The snow has thwarted many of Judy's best intentions over the years.

OWNING A HORSE

Once a horse owner, the challenges continued. My first was a green Appendix Quarter Horse. He developed a mysterious condition where his heart rate would not increase with exercise.



A friend that was headed for the vet school more than two hours away offered to take my horse and I along so he could be evaluated. Snow began to fall during the day. On the way home, it became heavy, and we went off the road into the median on the interstate. Somehow, the truck and trailer stayed upright, and everyone was OK.

While I sat in the cab and worried about the horse, my friend went for help. I stepped into the snow to check on him and feed him carrots. The friend finally returned with a driver and tow truck, who was able to pull us out. It felt like a miracle. The unexplained problem with my horse's heart eventually disappeared.

When it was time to geld my large American Warmblood colt, Careem, the vet's helper did not arrive, so it was just me and the vet. Once the colt was down in the sand ring, I had to hold his head down.

Caring for a stall-bound horse requires fortitude. Careem did not want to be in there. He had injured a suspensory ligament in a front leg. Rewrapping an antsy horse while keeping track of cotton, Vetrap and cut pieces of duct tape is, out of necessity, a quickly learned skill that requires steady nerves. So did walking him in the front yard along a busy gravel road during his rehab.

Teaching Careem to load was difficult. He was big and stubborn, not fearful. He just did not want to get in. After getting help from several professionals, I managed to teach him to self-load, and we traveled happily together.

On a ride home from the vet clinic one day, my trailer blew a tire. We parked on the side of the road waiting for the repair truck. Interstate 81 traffic sped by us, inches from my horse's head.

I appreciate the service truck drivers who will change a loaded horse trailer tire on the side of a busy highway. My horse took it all calmly, in character. I was more worried than he was.

A DREAM OF SHOWING

As a child, I read books about girls and their horses going to horse shows, and this became my dream. It finally became real after hours, days, and years of riding.

My challenges combined at weekend shows and started with loading and trailering. Due to my location, I often do this alone—probably not wise, but useful in the pursuit of bravery. Once at the show grounds, I hurry to unload horse and gear, tack up, and get safely over to the crowded warm-up ring full of nervous horses and riders and yelling trainers. We meet these challenges.

I usually don't have a trainer with me, which leaves me and my horse on our own to stay out of everyone's way. Once we enter the dressage ring, nothing else matters. After every test, I want to go back in the ring so I can ride it again better. I love these weekends, and now realize how lucky I am.

With the horse of a lifetime, Montreal, my challenges continued. I needed to call upon the years of bravery exercises to continue my dream. Now, I was headed to different barns with different clinicians, to whom we pay significant fees to correct our position and cues to help our horses move to their potential.

Friends helped me teach Montreal to load. He had arrived after a bad experience. Loading him at home, we would make a chute with the trailer and doors so there was only no other alternative. We would put his buddy in the next stall for moral support. Eventually, I taught him to self-load and the trips for lessons became easy.

This past winter was tough, with snow piled everywhere. Strong winds blew all day and night, leaving the way to the hay barn impassible. Drifts made the gates difficult or impossible to open.



Climbing through the fence was the only alternative. Using old ski poles made my trek possible. I've started and ended my journey living in snow country, where my braveness and strength saves the day.

Throughout the years, I have been helped by friends and instructors to get past and learn from situations requiring resilience and confidence. I'm sure I am not alone. ■

A lifelong dream of showing finally came true after much hard work and many solo trailer rides.

JUDY NAUSEEF is a horse owner and a freelance writer. She writes profiles, travel articles, book reviews, and articles about gardens, plants, and horse ownership. Judy's interests are sustainability, climate change, and native habitat gardens. She bought her first horse at 32, but started to ride seriously 10 years before that. She lives on 10 acres of pasture and gardens. judynauseef.com

happy as a HORSE

Ask yourself these five questions
to see if your horse is as happy as he is healthy.

BY AIMEE ROBINSON

Happiness—it's something that we see," says Esther Kuhlmann of Northland Equine Lessons and Training near Kansas City, Mo. "When you work with horses, they speak to you and tell you how they're feeling. They get a different gleam in their eyes; it's something that you learn over time."

Bucking, kicking out, or putting their ears back are all signs of displeasure in horses. Kuhlmann also says to watch facial expressions, such as tension in the nostrils, ears and eyes.

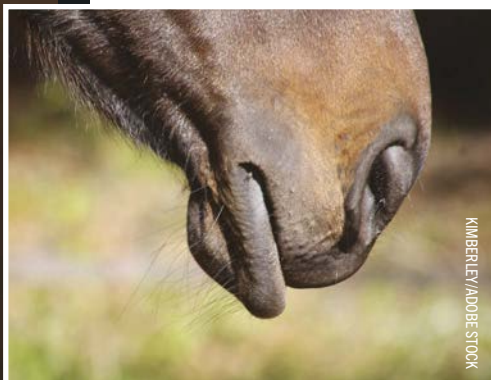
"Those signs of distress and displeasure are very reliable, but when we don't see these indicators of unhappiness, don't quickly assume that a horse is happy," says Robin Foster, Ph.D., CAAB, certified equine behaviorist and university professor. "Historically, there has been emphasis on the absence of indicators of unhappiness or distress, with a focus on assuming that if the horse is not showing distress or displeasure, he must be happy. Now, there is increasing interest in looking for signs of happiness."

She further explains the change in research focus.

"Current research and theoretical interest is shifting away from, 'If it's not bad welfare, it's good enough,'" says Foster. "We're not looking at it that way anymore. For example, we know that a shut-down horse could be very stressed and not showing any behavioral or body language indicators of stress. Currently, we're looking for behaviors and body language signals that indicate a horse is relaxed and content." This means a happier horse overall.

Visible signs of relaxation and contentment are easily recognizable and may include:

- ◆ A horse that is attentive to and engaged with their environment.
- ◆ A soft, round eye with regular blinking.



KIMBERLEY/ADOBE STOCK

Signs of relaxation and contentment include a drooping lower lip, lowered head, and resting a hind leg.





RABBIT/ADOBE STOCK

Free movement and social interaction are extremely important to your horse's happiness.

- ◆ Slightly lowered and more relaxed head position.
 - ◆ Posture that may not be perfectly square; for example, resting a hind foot.
 - ◆ Relaxed and loose bottom lip, possibly displaying a slightly gaping mouth.
- What if your horse could be happier? Here are five questions to ask yourself.

1. Unhappiness or health challenge?

When a horse in training becomes noticeably “unhappy,” Kuhlmann says she’ll contact their veterinarian to run a blood panel to ensure the horse is not managing through any pain or health challenges.

“It’s something I do fairly fast,” she says. “They may have a chipped tooth or need body work done from their chiropractor. It doesn’t take much.”

2. Is your horse social?

“If horses don’t have a social life with other horses, and a rich, complex environment, you can bet that affects their overall behavior,” says

Foster. “No matter how much you care for your horse, humans have very complex lives with many demands—the horse being only one of many. Your life with your horse is maybe an hour a day. The amount of time a person spends with their horse can be limited, and what does the horse do the remaining 23 hours?”

3. Is he moving freely?

“Horses need the ability to move freely,” says Foster. “Happy horses are free to run, roll, turn wildly, race around and kick up their heels—not just move in a fixed way, such as longeing. All of this can play a role in a horse’s behavior.”

They prioritize turnout at Kuhlmann’s barn.

“We don’t keep horses in stalls 24/7,” she says. “I compare [stabled horses] to prisoners, in that they only get something to eat when given to them or socialization when we say ‘hi’ to them. This is where your cribbing, stress and weaving come from. They are herd animals and grazers, and they move better as their joints keep moving and they are not confined

to standing still in a stall. The more turnout, the better for their bodies and minds.”

4. Does your horse enjoy his job?

“We all have our limits in what we can or can’t do,” says Kuhlmann. “When you look for a horse, be mindful that you find one who can do what you want and a partner who will enjoy the discipline they are in. If your horse is tight and angry, he won’t succeed in that sport. If this is your only horse, you need to do what your horse likes to do.”

5. Is it a partnership or a dictatorship?

“Your horse should see you as a partner, not the boss of them,” says Kuhlmann. “Instead of coming in and acting dominant and in charge, it’s more of a partnership. If you don’t treat your partner right, your partner won’t treat you right.”

As much joy as our horses bring to our world, keep these thoughts in mind to bring even more joy to theirs. ■

AIMEE ELYSE ROBINSON is an Oklahoma-based journalist and equestrian. She draws from her lifelong experience with horses, coupled with the veterinary wisdom bestowed upon her from her years working in animal health. She is co-recipient of the 2022 AHP Equine Media NextGen Award.



TERRI CAGE/ADOBE STOCK

Pay careful attention to whether your horse seems to be enjoying his work. If he’s tight and angry, he may not be in the right riding discipline.



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Help for HARD TIMES

Safety net programs help horse owners in need.

BY ELIZABETH MOYER

When a person encounters a speed bump like a financial crisis or health issue, it can be challenging to cope. But for horse owners, it's even more difficult to manage these obstacles. Many don't know where to turn for help, which puts their horses at risk.

However, a growing number of resources are now available to assist horse owners having a hard time providing essential care for their horses. These safety net programs provide vital support that can help horses stay in their homes.

"The goal of a safety net is to be able to provide the support necessary to keep a horse in [his current] home when that's in the best interest of the horse," explains Emily Weiss, Ph.D., American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) vice-president of equine welfare.

"Ultimately, we want fewer horses coming into shelters and rescues," says Weiss. "Elevating the visibility that these solutions exist can help keep those horses from neglect or having to come to a shelter and be relinquished."

One key program working to do just that is the United Horse Coalition's Equine Resource Database (UHCERD). Launched in 2020, this searchable online database of over 1,200 horse rescues, sanctuaries and shelters puts help a click away. Owners can search by state and

by type of help needed, from hay and feed to euthanasia and disposal, as well as rehoming and other forms of assistance.

Horse health issues are a common setback where safety net services can make a difference. The Vet Direct Safety Net program managed by the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) and The Foundation for the Horse in partnership with the ASPCA was created to help horse owners in need pay for emergency vet care.

Horse rescues are also working hard to meet people where they are and to provide broader assistance beyond relinquishing and rehoming horses.

HELPING HORSE OWNERS

Recent numbers from the Equine Welfare Data Collective, a research program of the United Horse Coalition, focus on quantifying and understanding the horse rescue pipeline. They reveal that 77 percent of horses coming into rescues and shelters are surrendered by their owners or confiscated by law enforcement. Owner finances are the most common reason reported for surrender, followed by owner health.

"This reaffirms through data what we already knew anecdotally—that to make the



COURTESY ASPCA

biggest change for at-risk horses and stem the tide, we have to start at the source, and that is by helping horse owners who have fallen on hard times,” says Ashley Harkins, United Horse Coalition (UHC) director. “This is at the heart of what UHC does, and why the UHCERD exists—to promote responsible horse ownership and provide options for horse owners.”

To date, the UCH’s Equine Resource Database and Covid resource sites have had over 24,000 visitors.

“Through this database, we are able to give horse owners a vital lifeline and point them in the right direction to get the help they need *before* their horse ends up at risk,” says Harkins, noting that there are programs available in every part of the country. “If people need help, we can direct them to whatever resources they are in need of, or barring that, with the people who can help.”

In 2021, the ASPCA expanded their services in Oklahoma, establishing the Equine Transition

and Adoption Center pilot program to provide compassionate help and free services for equines in need, including subsidized veterinary care when it’s best for the horse to stay at home with the owner; compassionate euthanasia if needed to prevent suffering; or safe relinquishment so the horse can receive care before being placed in a loving new home through adoption.

This variety of services offers flexibility to provide the solution that’s right for that horse and owner at that moment.

“If you can’t keep your horse, we can take him and help him get a home,” says Weiss. “Or we can work together to see what solutions there are to help you keep your horse home. We see that as the solution, to be able to support horses within a community. It becomes a community resource.”

Tom Persechino, director of equine welfare for the ASPCA, notes that most horse owners reaching out to the Equine Transition and

The Vet Direct Safety Net program helped ease the financial burden for Trixie's owner and helped the mare get the care she needed for an eye issue.

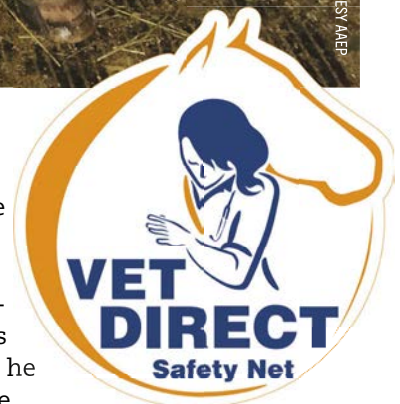


Adoption Center in Oklahoma have been able to hold onto their horses with just that little bit of support—often as simple as basic nutrition advice, treating an infection, managing minor lameness, or getting a horse up to date on vaccinations and routine care.

“If we can help horse owners get over whatever that challenge is that they’re facing in the moment, if there’s a safety net program that can help them get past that, we’ve proven that they can keep their horses long-term, they can keep them healthy, and they very rarely need to return for services or seek to surrender or relinquish them.”

Of all the services offered through the program, access to affordable vet care has proven to be significant. Simply providing support for metabolic issues like Cushing’s disease or treating dental problems can make a dramatic difference in keeping a horse healthy at home.

“Folks have reached out when their horse is losing significant weight and they think something horrific has happened, when he is simply not able to chew his food,” says Weiss. “That’s an issue that is easily resolved.”



VET DIRECT SAFETY NET

Vet emergencies cause financial stress for both owners in need and veterinarians who want to be able to help them and their horses.

Through the AAEP’s Vet Direct program, equine veterinarians who register to participate can provide up to \$600 of veterinary services per animal to assist horse owners in



COURTESY AAEP

need. This allows vets to identify and provide care for at-risk equines in their communities and offer relief to horse owners who are unable to afford veterinary care.

“Vet Direct was launched as a way to see if there were horses that could remain in the home rather than being surrendered when they faced a medical issue at a time when their owner needed some sort of help due to circumstances they were facing,” says Keith Kleine, AAEP director of industry relations.

The program has assisted owners who were experiencing financial difficulty due to things like medical issues (themselves or immediate family members), loss of job or income, or other temporary situations. But long-term, Kleine says, if they could get help with some practical veterinary care, they could keep their horses.

The Vet Direct Safety Net covers urgent vet care such as wound treatment, eye issues, neurologic problems, choke, and non-surgical colic care, as well as euthanasia and disposal if recovery is unlikely.

Since its inception in 2017, the Vet Direct program has helped many equines. This includes horses like Trixie, who got the help she needed to overcome an ongoing eye issue. A donkey named Perk would have been euthanized after a dog attack without the financial support of Vet Direct. Another horse, Sugar, was lame and in so much pain she could hardly walk. Thanks to funds from Vet Direct, radiographs helped with a diagnosis, and with foam pads and regular trims she was able to walk comfortably again.

Tracking this program over the last few years shows that most horses receiving treatment through Vet Direct remain safe and healthy in their homes, according to the ASPCA.

For those cases where euthanasia is recommended as the most humane option to alleviate pain and suffering, Vet Direct is also able to help with those costs.

“The number of horses that suffer simply because the owner can’t afford euthanasia and disposal is significant,” says Weiss. “A number of owners hold off because it’s difficult to talk about. Having a veterinarian come to you through this program to navigate that [situation] is incredibly helpful.”

ASKING FOR HELP

Rescues are trying to be more proactive by providing short-term assistance to owners who qualify and acting as a resource in times of need, says Harkins.

The AAEP reminds horse owners that it’s important to ask for help before situations become dire. These organizations and programs are poised to help more horses if they are called upon before the animals are starving, says Kleine. Most importantly, there is no shame or judgment in asking for help. Vets, safety net administrators, and others involved in equine welfare recognize that hard times can happen to anyone.

“Asking for help is difficult, but it is incredibly admirable,” he says.

That’s why these programs exist—they want to provide assistance.

“When somebody raises their hand and says, ‘I’m having trouble and I want to do right by this horse and I need your help,’ that’s why we’re here,” says Weiss. ■

Dr. David Alexander was able to save the life of an injured donkey thanks to funding from Vet Direct, which allows veterinarians to provide urgent care for clients who are struggling financially.

Lifelong equestrian ELIZABETH MOYER is the former editor of *Horse Illustrated* and *Young Rider* magazines who loves living in the beautiful Bluegrass horse country of Kentucky. She enjoys dressage and trail riding and has a soft spot for senior horses.

RESOURCES

ASPCA Right Horse

myrighthorse.org

ASPCA Equine Transition and Adoption Center

aspcas.org/etac

United Horse Coalition Equine Resource Database

unitedhorsecoalition.org/equine-resource-database

Vet Direct Safety Net

aaep.org/horse-owners/vet-direct-safety-net

[PART 2]

WESTERN STOPS

Trainer Aaron Ralston demonstrates the difference between reining and cow-horse stops differ in the conclusion of this two-part series.

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY HEIDI NYLAND MELOCCO

A fast-stopping horse sliding into a cloud of dust is an icon for western riding. Horses in reining classes stop with sliders on their back hooves to accentuate downward transitions. In cow-horse classes, the horse's stop blocks the cow's motion—compounding the action as arena dirt flies.

Here, trainer Aaron Ralston demonstrates how the western stop is differs with and without cattle present. Ralston says the same horse can stop well in a reining class and learn how to stop a cow.

"The best cow-horse must be as broke as the best reining horse and as connected to a cow as the best cutting horse," he says. "Then responsibility falls to the rider. If you use your reins and leg, it must be in time with the objective of the cow."

The horse must be tuned into the rider for the reining stop cue and tuned into the cow for great cow-horse stops.

The horse should have a relaxed, rounded back when doing a sliding stop. There should not be any excess pressure on the reins to give the cue.

"For the reining stop, you need to have a great stop, then change directions," he says. "When you're working cows, the cattle shift right and left, and you're always reacting."

STOPPING TIME

No matter what type of class you're preparing for, Ralston recommends keeping your cues consistent. When you visualize how to move your hands to rein for the stops, keep in mind the clock image from part 1 of this series.

With the clock face over your horse's body—and 12 o'clock at his ears—you'll move your hands toward 6 o'clock to cue for a stop. You'll then return your hand to the middle of the clock to allow your horse to move his neck freely without a tight rein.

THE REINING STOP

For the perfect reining stop, the horse's back should hunch into the stop while his hind hooves reach toward the front hooves. The horse's front legs should move freely as the horse skates into the stop.

The horse's neck naturally telescopes out and down to counterbalance his weight going down in the back. There will be a nice arc from the nose to the hind end. Ralston warns that you don't want a lot of rein or bit contact—little to none.

To put this scene into action, Ralston says he approaches the stop with gradually building speed. As the horse runs down to the stop,







LEFT: As you move the cow down the fence, keep your body aligned through shoulder, hip and heel.

RIGHT: With your body relaxed and shoulders back, you'll be balanced for the cow-work stop; you don't want your upper body to lean forward and put weight on your horse's front end.

his body position naturally changes, and his shoulders move back with the motion.

When you're ready to stop, make sure not to force your shoulders back. Instead, the way the horse moves should send your shoulders back—just like a jet taking off propels passengers back into their seats. This relaxed, natural back position means that the horse is moving his shoulders freely without weight tipping forward onto his front legs.

When it's time to ask for the stop, say "whoa," press the balls of your feet into your stirrups, drive your heels, then lift your hand for light contact. As you sit the stop, point your belt buckle to the sky and keep your chin up.

The reining stop was developed for the arena-performance class. Reining crowds cheer the loudest when horses glide over a long distance. This stop isn't used to work on the ranch. However, the horse's free movement and willingness to change speeds on command are always essential.

COW-HORSE STOP

For a cow-horse stop, the horse's front end doesn't pedal to balance the hindquarters'



sliding. Instead, the horse's front legs move more abruptly to allow him to change directions when the cow turns.

"If the cow and horse move down the fence then stop at the same time, the horse would keep moving down the fence while the cow changed directions and got away," Ralston says. "The reining stop with sliders is not practical for working cows."

Ralston says that for a well-trained horse, the easiest way to change from a reining stop to the stop needed for cattle work is to change the shoes. Ralston chooses back shoes for cattle work that allow the horse to move through the footing with his hind hooves but that have more friction than those that allow for a sliding stop.

To stop for a cow-horse class, position your body just as when stopping in a reining class. While the horse will move differently, your position remains the same. As you move with the cow down the fence, you want your shoulder, hip, and heel to align.

The trained horse will speed to take you to the spot that will stop the cow. The momentum of the horse should naturally move your shoulders behind your hips. With your shoulders back, you'll be balanced for the stop.

Note that in either stop, your body position should be relaxed with your shoulders back. If you lean forward on a cow turn, you can get thrown forward while the horse tries to change direction. In that case, the horse has all your weight on his front end—making his job difficult. Instead, keep your shoulders slightly back to be ready for any western stop. ■

MEET THE TRAINER

Trainer Aaron Ralston works his horses on his family's Collbran, Colo., cattle ranch and prepares them for world-class competition. He won Top 10 honors at the 2021 AQHA Versatility Ranch Horse World Show riding Blue Tucka Jo in Open Junior Ranch Trail and overall championship finals. Ralston also has championship titles in reining, cutting, working cow horse, and calf roping and earned gold for the United States reining team at the FEI World Equestrian Games.



HEIDI NYLAND MELOCCO is a photographer and writer based in Mead, Colorado.



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ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY
SHOSHANA RUDSKI

The winter months can be tricky. It's hard to keep your horse from getting bored with the repetition of ring work, especially in places that rely on small indoor arenas.

These two exercises are simple to set up and useful for riders of all sports, including pleasure riders! They'll help keep you motivated to keep going through the colder months and keep your horse's brain and body engaged. Plus, you just need eight poles and four cones (or other objects), so setup is simple.

EXERCISE NO. 1: TRANSITIONS AND ACCURACY

Whether you're preparing to trot down the centerline or take on the trails come spring, nailing your transitions is a perfect winter goal to get you ready for the sunnier days ahead, and this versatile and easy-to-set-up exercise will come in handy. If space is very limited, it can even be set up on a 20-meter circle or expanded into a larger oval for greener horses and riders.

What you'll need:

- ◆ Eight poles
- ◆ Four cones or other marker objects (we used fake rocks here)
- ◆ Set up four trot poles, evenly spaced around 4.5 feet apart





SMALL SPACE SOLUTIONS



Four trot poles and four canter poles can be set on a 20-meter circle or an oval, along with a “halt box” made up of four markers.

- ◆ Set up four canter poles, evenly spaced, around 9 feet apart

- ◆ Set up four cones or other objects in a rectangle, around 3 feet wide by 8 feet long to make a “halt box.”

The goal of the exercise is to create responsive and prompt transitions. However, putting the entire exercise together in one go can be tricky, so it’s best to start by separating the parts and build on your new skills.

Start by trotting through the trot poles and cantering through the canter poles separately. Then practice a square halt in the space between the cones (or other markers). Once you and your horse are comfortable with all parts of the exercise separately, it’s time to put everything together.

It’s simplest to start in the halt box. Next, pick up your trot and trot over the trot poles. The goal is to canter before you get to your canter poles, then halt again in the box.

It takes a lot of fine tuning to get your transitions prompt enough to be accurate, so don’t worry if it takes a number of tries to put it all together.

You can also try the exercise in reverse, starting in the halt box, asking for a canter transition, and then trotting before your trot poles before once again halting in the halt box.

One of the best things about this exercise is how it can be adapted for all levels of horses and riders. If you aren’t ready to canter your horse yet, you can trot through both sets of poles.

If halting in the halt box is too much of an ask, you can try a walk transition in this space, or just keep cruising through the box without a transition at all.

If your horse’s halt-to-canter transition isn’t spot on yet, you can adapt the exercise by walking a few strides, picking up your trot, and then ask for your canter just before the canter poles.

Essentially, the three different elements of the setup are markers for transitions, but which transitions you do are up to you! Just don’t try to canter through the trot poles (they are spaced too closely for a canter stride).

EXERCISE NO. 2: NAIL YOUR LEADS

The second exercise focuses on asking for the correct lead and quickly identifying what lead your horse is on.

What you’ll need:

- ◆ Eight to 10 poles

- ◆ Optional: Three sets of cavallettis or standards
You’ll need a little more space for this setup, but it’s still perfect for a smaller indoor and can easily fit in a dressage ring.

- ◆ Set up four trot poles, spaced evenly, followed by a 9-foot gap to another pole.

- ◆ Set up two more poles lightly to the right and left of the 9-foot-spaced pole, three to four canter strides away.

Start by trotting through all of the poles, then trot straight ahead between the two offset cavalletti. Once you and your horse are comfortable, try asking for a canter after the four trot poles, before the 9-foot spaced canter pole.

Next, it’s time to incorporate the two bending lines to work on your canter leads. There are two ways of doing this:

1. Go through your trot poles and canter over the canter pole, letting your horse pick which lead to land on. If he picks the right lead, head toward the pole to your right. If he lands on the left lead, head toward the left pole. See how fast you can tell which lead your horse is on—you don’t have many strides to make your decision!

2. After trotting through your trot poles, cue your horse specifically for the right or left lead canter. Carry on to the coordinating second pole. Alternate which lead you aim for, keeping both yourself and your horse on your toes and focused.

EXTRA CHALLENGE

After the second canter pole, ask your horse to pick up the opposite lead (for example, if you cantered over the right pole, ask for the left lead), then loop



back toward the start of the exercise to pop over the other pole option in the opposite direction.

This exercise can easily be adjusted for lots of different levels of riders and horses. For greener horses, everything can remain poles on the ground. For more experienced pairs, the canter poles can become cavallettis. If you want to mix things up a little more, you can also incorporate larger jumps (in place of the poles/cavallettis) into the exercise to add an extra challenge.



LEFT: Set four trot poles followed 9 feet later by a canter pole; three to four canter strides to the right and left, set another pole.

RIGHT: Begin by trotting through the entire exercise. Eventually, you will canter after the four trot poles.

Keeping yourself and your horse active and busy this winter will set you up to be ready to get back into the show ring, on the trails, or in the outdoor arenas as soon as the warmer weather is back!

Special thanks to our models, Ashley Anderson and Global Jedi, for demonstrating these exercises. ❖

SHOSHANA RUDSKI rides, trains and competes her own and client horses in dressage and eventing in Lexington, Ky.



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ANSIE/ADOBE STOCK

10 COMMON *mistakes*

The following are simple to be on the lookout for, but you have to be vigilant when keeping an eye on your horse's health and care quality.

BY LOUANN CHAUDIER

No one goes through life without making mistakes, and luckily for us, most errors have minor consequences. Even so, life with horses raises the bar because they are large, heavy, quick, and easy to scare.

We worry about our horses being too hot or too cold or exposed to sudden weather fluctuations. We stand in stores reading fly spray labels to determine which might work best and

fret about whether a rain sheet, mid-weight, or heavy turnout rug is necessary, only to then worry about our horse sweating or shivering under it if we pick the wrong one.

Therefore, it's not surprising that our overworked minds might miss something. Problems pop up like pasture weeds. Here are 10 potentially problematic horse care mistakes to keep on your radar.

1. OVER-BLANKETING

Opinions about blanketing horses are as fraught with emotion as those about keeping newborn babies warm. Is the baby cold? Too warm? Is the blanket too tight, too loose? When should it be removed? The decision to blanket depends primarily upon weather conditions, temperature, available shelter, and your horse's haircoat.

If your horse lives outdoors and wears a turnout rug, it should be removed daily for grooming while his skin is checked for rubs and his overall body condition is noted. Clipped horses have their natural protection removed, and need heavier blankets than horses with natural coats. Rain sheets and mid-weights are often enough for unclipped horses, while heavy rugs and neck covers are usually needed if the horse is clipped, thin, or used to a warmer climate.

Many healthy animals with a natural coat don't need blanketing in winter as long as they have access to shelter from wind and precipitation. Blankets should always be removed if your horse is sweating underneath. It's easier and far worse for a horse to overheat than be uncomfortable from cold or breezy weather, so err on the side of underblanketing instead of overblanketing.

2. MOLDY HAY

Buying hay is always a challenge and has become more so in the last decade. Small square bales

have given way to large ones, and round bales are practically impossible to assess for quality.

Drought conditions have made the supply smaller, with farmers baling fewer cuttings every year. Prices are high, requiring long searches for good hay in a tough market. Too often, when hay prices get high, horse owners are tempted to lower their standards and feed bales they would typically reject. This is risky, since bad hay causes respiratory problems and can be fatal if it is contaminated with blister beetles or toxic plants.

Never mistake tight, heavy bales or a green tint for quality, as weight can indicate that the hay was baled damp and the green color can be sprayed on like a faux lawn. There's no substitute for your eyes and nose.

Learn what good hay looks and smells like and always inspect a few bales before you purchase. Even if you board your horse, always keep a close eye on what he is eating and insist on quality hay.

3. DUSTY BEDDING

Dusty bedding, hay, and arena footing can trigger equine asthma, a respiratory disease that is much harder to treat than to prevent (see "Breathe Easier," *Horse Illustrated* September 2022 issue). When buying pine shavings, check the wrapper to make sure you are buying the dust-free option. The cheaper products can become very expensive if your horse ends up with a persistent cough.



Dusty bedding can trigger equine asthma, so look for dust-free shavings.

Keep feed containers and protruding hooks out of your barn aisle, and make sure any cross-ties have breakaway attachments.



ANNABELL CSODI/ADOBE STOCK

Shredded newspaper is the lowest-dust bedding available, although it may not be feasible to find in all areas. Straw bedding is the highest in dust.

4. CLUTTERED BARN AISLES

Your barn aisle is ground zero for your horse activities. It should be de-cluttered periodically and assessed for safety.

A horse may have gone in and out of his stall without incident for years, but it only takes one mistake for a door handle to slice his flank enough to require stitches. Protruding tack hooks and slippery footing are other avoidable accidents waiting to happen.

Cross-ties should always have breakaway hardware fastened closest to the wall so if you need to unfasten it in an emergency, you aren't as close to a panicking horse. A loop of baling twine between the hardware and the wall hook is another breakaway point that will hold everyday forces but gives in case of a panicked pull-back.

Another potential hazard is the placement of feed containers in the aisle in front of stalls. Many horses are escape artists, and nothing tempts them like available food they know is just inches away.

5. NO PRE-PURCHASE VET CHECK

Both experienced and novice horse buyers often skip a pre-purchase exam for a variety of reasons: cost, inconvenience of scheduling, not knowing a local veterinarian where the horse is located, and believing they have the skills to detect conformation flaws or signs of looming disease.

A pre-purchase exam is not a health guarantee because the vet is only examining what exists the day of the exam, but any major issues will be a red flag to a professional who treats horses on a regular basis.

Laminitis has a lingering imprint in the ridges on a horse's hooves; a heart murmur declares its presence through a stethoscope; and lameness is often subtle and difficult to detect—all are best assessed by a veterinarian. The fee for this service is tiny compared to owning a horse that you can't sell in good faith (for more on pre-purchase exams, see "Buyer be Educated," *Horse Illustrated* September 2022 issue).

6. CONTRACTS FOR HORSE SALES OR LEASE AGREEMENTS

The era of closing a horse sale with a handshake is long gone, yet many purchase agreements today have an abysmal paper trail. We live in a world that requires documentation as protection against lawsuits and disputes between parties who can't remember the details of the original transaction.

For more, to www.horseillustrated.com/avoiding-equine-legal-issues.

7. FAILING TO PRE-CHECK YOUR TRAILER

You've probably been there before: You're in such a hurry to get on the road to the horse show or late for that trail ride that you skip the checklist of pre-departure truck, hitch and trailer inspections before starting the engine.

Owning a new trailer does not preclude a safety check on door and window latches, air vents, butt



© GETTY IMAGES/ADOBESTOCK

bars (if you have them), tire inflation, trailer lights, hitch connections, and electric wiring. Trailer windows should be open (with grills closed) based on weather and predicted inside temperature once underway. Most of the time, the temperature inside the trailer is much hotter than outside.

8. BUYING AND KEEPING AN UNSUITABLE HORSE

Far too many people fall in love with a horse at first sight (or photo), throw caution to the wind and buy it, only to soon discover he's not suited to their skills or needs. Disappointed new owners may resist selling because they are already emotionally committed. This situation typically ends with the horse as a pasture pet or the owner hiring a costly trainer to fix what usually can't be fixed—an unhappy owner paired with an unsuitable horse.

Buy a horse for what you want to do with him, not because he's a fashionable breed or has a flashy coat. Buyers should remember the adage, "A good horse is never a bad color."

9. TRYING NEW THINGS WHILE YOUR HORSE IS DISTRACTED

Don't set yourself up for failure by ignoring obvious warning signs when teaching your horse something new. Cold, windy weather is not the best time to introduce sidepassing or trail riding. Impending storms often usher in erratic behavior in horses and cause problems under saddle.

Avoid trying to train when the arena is filled with distractions like jumping ponies and galloping reiners. Your horse learns better when he can focus. Likewise, don't expect concentration when it's feeding time and all of the other horses are happily digging into their meal.

10. SPOILING YOUR HORSE

Horses are like children in that they will take advantage of weak leadership, and they occasionally need correction. Failing to assert yourself as the leader of your "herd of two" usually ends in disappointment, if not injury.

If you can't assert yourself enough to do this, your horse will step right into the role. Watch two horses turned out together and you'll see they settle who is in charge within minutes, and every breach of that agreement will be challenged. Horse owners should never fall for the myth that horses love those who placate and spoil them. Horses respect clear leadership, not pushover love.

Every horse owner has made one of these mistakes and probably asked themselves later why they didn't listen to their inner voice telling them another day would be better to try something new. There is no need to learn a lesson the hard way! ❏

Never buy a horse sight unseen or due to a pretty color. The most important thing is that his temperament matches your ambitions and skill level.

LOUANN CHAUDIER is a longtime contributor to *Horse Illustrated* and author of the e-book *Reality Horse Ownership*, available on Amazon or Barnes and Noble's websites.

More Than LONG EARS

Caring for a donkey's health needs can be quite a bit different than a horse's; here are some of the key differences.

BY CYNTHIA McFARLAND

As donkeys grow in popularity as pasture companions, livestock guardians and pets, it's essential that current and prospective owners understand their basic care. This is especially important when it comes to nutrition—an area where donkeys differ dramatically from horses.

To learn more, we checked in with the nation's largest donkey rescue and a long-time miniature donkey breeder.

DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES THAN HORSES

One of the greatest differences between horses and donkeys is their mindset regarding anything new. Horses react; donkeys think it through.

"If you want an animal who takes orders, a donkey is not a good choice; if you want a companion, a donkey is a good choice," says Cindy Benson, who has been breeding miniature donkeys for the last 30 years.

"Miniature donkey is a breed; Mediterranean or Sicilian is descriptive of the same animal," explains Benson, whose Benson Ranch is located in Gold Hill, Ore. "Mini donkeys are like a cross

between a Labrador and a kindergartener; they're more like dogs than horses. They never outgrow their 'foal behaviors,' so they act more like baby animals for life, which makes them good pets."

Ask anyone what word they first associate with "donkey," and it's probably "stubborn." However, this is a misleading stereotype.

"It's a misnomer that donkeys are stubborn; that's their self-preservation drive," says Kim Elger, Chief Operating Officer for Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue (PVDR), the largest donkey rescue organization in the U.S. "Getting past that requires trust, which is a huge building block to a relationship with a donkey. Once you get to that point, they are loving, affectionate and easily trained. They love their people. They are man's other best friend. Like dogs, they want to be a helper and supervisor."

Headquartered in San Angelo, Texas, PVDR has satellite facilities in several states. Since its founding in 2000, the 501(c)3 nonprofit organization has rescued over 13,000 donkeys, both wild and domesticated.



DIETER HAWLAN/ADOBE STOCK

LEFT: If you plan to start working with donkeys, keep in mind they have a different personality than a horse.

RIGHT: Donkeys don't do well alone, so if you want one, plan on having a pair.



DREAMRIDERS PHOTOGRAPHY



CHRIS BRIGNELL/ADOBE STOCK

“Donkeys are prey animals and have one of the highest self-preservation drives of any equine,” Elger explains. “They don’t spook like a horse. Their ‘fight or flight’ instinct tends to lean toward fight. They will size you up and won’t run from you, but they defend themselves if need be.”

BRING HOME A PAIR

Both Benson and Elger emphasize the importance of not having a solo donkey. For the animal’s sake, you want to have at least two.

“Just having one donkey creates a pushier, bossier animal because they’re socially deprived and needy,” notes Benson.

NUTRITIONAL NEEDS

Improper feeding is the most common mistake donkey owners make. If you have a donkey as a companion for a horse, separate them at feeding time.

As descendants of the African wild ass from the arid deserts of Africa, donkeys have lower caloric needs than other equines.

“Obesity kills donkeys faster than anything,” says Benson. “Donkeys are bred to be thrifty and efficient with food.”

Elger agrees.

“They’re used to surviving on scarce resources, and their bodies are conditioned to utilize every bit of food,” she says.

A dry lot will be an important part of your donkey’s health if you live in an area with lush grazing. Donkeys are very thrifty with their calories and don’t need to eat as much as horses.



MARK J. BARRETT/ADOBE STOCK

“People tend to assume that donkeys can be fed like horses, so they overindulge with treats or allow too much access to grazing. Donkeys gain weight a lot faster than horses, and obesity will shorten their lifespan.”

Dry lots can be critically important for turnout if you live in an area with plentiful grazing.

“Having a dry lot is one of the best things you can do to prevent donkeys from getting obese,” says Elger. “This allows you to limit the amount of grazing.” She recommends only allowing a few hours of afternoon grazing, since grass sugar is highest in the morning.

Improper feeding can lead to obesity, founder and insulin resistance. Abrupt diet changes and stress can put donkeys at risk of hyperlipaemia, a life-threatening condition occurs when too much fat builds up in the blood, leading to organ failure.

“A protein level below 10 percent is ideal for donkeys,” says Elger. “Suitable hay would be a grass hay, such as Bermuda, coastal, orchard, timothy or brome. Don’t feed alfalfa—the protein can easily exceed 25 percent.”

Feed 2 percent of the donkey’s body weight in hay per day. For a standard donkey weighing 500 pounds, that amounts to 10 pounds of hay daily. For a mini donkey weighing 300 pounds, it’s about 6 pounds.

Because they don’t need a lot of hay, keep donkeys happily chewing by spacing out feedings during the day.

Fresh, cool water should always be available, along with a mineral block.

Although you’ve probably guessed it by now, be sure to skip the grain!

“Feeding grain is overkill; donkeys don’t need this supplementation,” says Elger.

WEIGHT CONCERNS

The donkey’s crest is the first place you’ll notice weight gain.

“Put your hands on the neck,” says Benson. “A loose, ‘squishy’ crest is healthy. If it’s getting firm or flopping over, that’s [too much] weight gain. It’s not the size of the crest, but how solid it is. Mini donkeys are round by nature, so their bellies won’t tell you they’re overweight.”

Overfed donkeys can also develop fat “pones” (fatty deposits) on their bodies. These deposits won’t go away, even if the diet is corrected.

WATCH THE TREATS

“Manners matter,” says Benson. “If a behavior is not acceptable with a 1,200-pound horse, don’t let your donkey do it either. It’s hard to get a farrier to work with them if they’re pushy and disrespectful.”



CINDY BENSON

Many owners unintentionally encourage pushy behavior with treats.

“Food creates social stress for animals,” Benson continues. “Once you take food out to multiple donkeys, they become competitive, and it increases stress between them. If you come without food and just touch, talk and love on them, it won’t make them competitive with each other. Choose relationships over treats.”

If you must give treats, do so in moderation and one-on-one. Carrots can present a choking hazard because of their shape, so cut them into sticks, not round sections.

Elger uses treats in PVDR’s positive reinforcement training program, but only when working with a single donkey. She feeds low-sugar equine treats or carrots, either shredded or cut into 2-inch sticks.

An overweight donkey from the rear shows telltale fat pones on the sides and hips (center of photo).

HOOF CARE

Donkey hoof growth varies between individuals and is affected by age, seasonal changes, living conditions and amount of exercise.

“In the wild, donkeys are walking 7 to 10 miles a day and naturally wearing down their

GELDING A DONKEY

If you get a jack (male donkey), castration is recommended, ideally before they’re 1 year old. (Remember, they can not only impregnate a female donkey, called a jenny, but also any mares you may have!)

“Once jacks reach sexual maturity, they become more aggressive and frustrated,” says Kim Elger of Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue.

“The gelding process is different for donkeys than horses,” she adds. “They need ligation, and can bleed to death if not castrated properly, so choose a veterinarian familiar with donkey castration.”



PIXEL SHOT/ADOBE STOCK

Donkeys do not need grain to provide concentrated calories. Feed 2 percent of bodyweight per day in hay, choosing grass hay instead of a richer alfalfa.

hooves, but this is not the case with the donkey in your backyard,” says Elger.

Generally speaking, donkeys should be trimmed every 8 to 12 weeks. Avoid going longer than 13 weeks between trims.

VACCINATIONS

Like horses, donkeys should be protected by annual vaccination.

“We recommend vaccinating for eastern and western encephalitis (EEE and WEE), tetanus, rabies, West Nile and rhino,” says Elger. “Talk to your veterinarian about what is recommended in your region.”

DEWORMING

Internal parasite management is an important part of donkey health care. Your veterinarian can help create an individualized deworming plan.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Donkeys are playful, thoughtful animals and appreciate the opportunity to play.

“You will greatly increase quality of life for a donkey in a small area by providing toys,” says long-time miniature donkey breeder Cindy Benson, who notes that donkeys enjoy softer toys they can grab with their mouths.

Safe options include:

- ◆ traffic cones
- ◆ exercise balls
- ◆ rubber boots
- ◆ hula hoops with marbles inside

“Donkeys are more prone to lungworms than other equines, so we recommend using an ivermectin dewormer every six months,” says Elger, adding that fecal testing is helpful for an effective deworming program.

DENTAL CARE

Schedule an annual dental exam for your donkeys. They may not require actual dental work every year, but should be examined just to be sure.

“Donkeys can run into issues with teeth as they age, so after age 20, they should have a dental exam every six months,” adds Elger, noting that it’s not unusual for domesticated donkeys to live into their 30s and 40s.

SHELTER NECESSITIES

Unlike horses, who “fluff up” with an undercoat in winter, donkeys don’t have this ability. Perhaps due to their African origins, their coats don’t repel water like a horse’s, so a soaked donkey can get dangerously cold in rain, snow and windy conditions.

Blankets are rarely needed, but shelter is a necessity.

“Donkeys have to stay dry to adequately regulate their body temperature,” says Elger.

Likewise, shade is crucial in summer.

A STOIC ANIMAL

Stoicism is a donkey trademark.

“Living in the wild, the weakest are the first to go, so a donkey will hide illness and injury and not show pain,” says Elger. “By the time a donkey’s body language is showing pain, you already have a very ill donkey and need to get a veterinarian out immediately.”

Benson agrees.

“A donkey will show you at day two what a horse shows you in the first hours,” she says. “By the time a donkey shows you something is wrong, it’s already an emergency.”

Signs a donkey is unwell include:

- ◆ Any lack of appetite
- ◆ Ears held out flat to the sides (“helicopter ears”)
- ◆ Head held straight out instead of upright
- ◆ Acting “off” from normal behavior

With a little extra thought toward their special health needs, you can have a long and fulfilling partnership with these long-eared equines. ■

CYNTHIA McFARLAND is an Ocala, Fla.-based freelance writer, horse owner and avid trail rider. The author of nine books, her latest is *The Horseman’s Guide to Tack and Equipment*.

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Lovely LIBERTY WORK

Luke Gingerich gives some pointers for anyone interested in starting out in this appealing discipline that both horses and handlers can enjoy.

BY KIM MACMILLAN • PHOTOS BY KIM MACMILLAN/MACMILLAN PHOTOGRAPHY

A lone horseman stands in the spotlight. He gives a signal and his equine partner, a big bay with four white socks, gallops into the arena. The music starts and they move as one in an intricately planned, magical routine. His cues to the horse are incredibly subtle, and it seems horse and human share the same mind.

The performance is done at liberty, part of it working together on the ground and part of it bridleless under-saddle. Reining spins, flying lead changes, sliding stops, circles and lateral movements in step together on the ground, rearing and bowing on command, and more are intertwined into a mesmerizing show. It is awe inspiring, and the crowd loves it.

The man is Luke Gingerich, a rising star in the equestrian world, accompanied by his long-time partner, American Quarter Horse gelding CJ Rio Zan Bar Gun (aka "Rio"). The liberty work they do together may seem unattainable, but their dance is the result of lots of practice and finely tuned communication between the two.

Gingerich says it is something that most equestrians can learn to do with their horses, and he is on a mission to inspire and teach anyone who wants to work to achieve that goal.

"Liberty work requires a thorough understanding and awareness of your body language, timing, and feel, and how to use these to communicate with your horse," he explains. "But it's something that most anyone willing to put in the time, dedication, and consistency can experience with their horse."

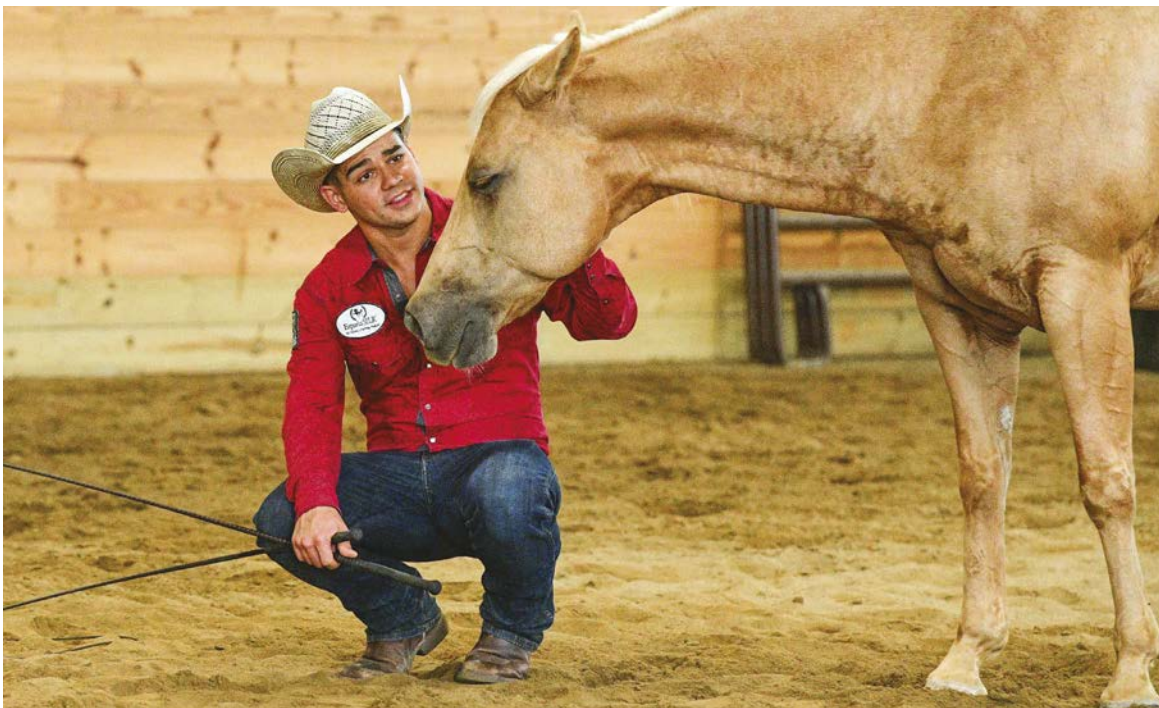
THE MAN BEHIND THE PERFORMANCE

Like many kids, Gingerich, who grew up in central Ohio, begged his parents for a pony. When he turned 10 years old, they purchased a mare named Misty for him. From then on, he was hooked. Several years later, he purchased his first Quarter Horse, a mare named Zippy; they competed in western pleasure and trail classes.

A fascination with liberty work from a young age led him to study with James Cooler in Summerfield, N.C. In 2017, he started training with



Clinician Luke Gingerich shows student Laurie Ferguson's 7-year-old Quarter Horse gelding how to soften his rib cage and relax and bend his body around the cue of the whip. The angle and position of Gingerich's body helps bring focus and connection from the horse as they execute an "in-hand mirroring" circle at the walk.



Gingerich connects with Quarter Horse gelding Beau during a Liberty Intensive Clinic in August 2022 at Luke Gingerich Horsemanship in Plain City, Ohio.

Clinic student Andrea Mears demonstrates neutral body position as she guides her mare, Lita, on a liberty canter circle. Lita's body exhibits softness, bend, and engagement in response to Mear's body language and whip cues.



Jesse and Stacy Westfall in Loudonville, Ohio, and he says that they have been a major influence in his horsemanship. A keen observer of equine behavior, he noticed that horses naturally want to be in sync with other members of their herd and do this by mirroring behavior of others in their group. He also saw how important body language is to horses in communication. He then applied these concepts to his training.

"I channel that desire and natural instinct to read subtle shifts and changes in body language to create complex maneuvers and behaviors that my horses become capable of doing at liberty with me," he explains.

PERFORMANCE LIBERTY HORSEMANSHIP

Helping horses learn how to use themselves correctly in a balanced and athletic way while working at liberty is also a personal mission. He is passionate about combining relationship-based training with training for high-level athleticism, and labels the combination of the two "performance liberty horsemanship."

"Both the mental and emotional connection, combined with the physical body control and muscle memory that this work creates, can be directly carried over into riding in many competitive disciplines," says Gingerich.

He's put it all into practice in both training and competition. In addition to liberty exhibitions and competition, he competes in reining, freestyle reining, ranch versatility, and most

recently, western dressage. He incorporates many dressage principles into his training.

In 2021, he brought 4-year-old palomino mare Tinseltowns Whizard (aka "Chloe") to Quarter Horse Congress, where their bridleless freestyle reining routine earned them a large following.

Thus far, all of Chloe's training under-saddle has been done without a bridle or reins or head gear of any kind. While Gingerich initially thought he would soon transition to tack, he was so pleased with how well Chloe's foundation of liberty work carried over to ridden work during the first rides of her life that he has remained on the bridleless journey with her ever since.

In 2018, people started asking him to teach them how to do what he and his horses were doing, so he started a business, Luke Gingerich Horsemanship, in his hometown of Plain City, Ohio. In 2021, with the help of family and friends, Gingerich built a facility where he holds clinics and lessons.

He has expanded his business by creating online training video library memberships. So far, he's traveled to 20 states to compete, teach and perform, and has students from nearly all equestrian disciplines.

WHY AT-LIBERTY WORK?

Almost any horse can do liberty work with proper training, at least at a basic level, says Gingerich. Yet, liberty work is more than just turning your horse loose in an enclosure and chasing them around.



Mears works on an in-hand mirroring trot circle. She uses the whip to help guide Lita into collection, resulting in better posture.

“It should be more of a dance—a constant two-way communication with our horses—where we can guide and direct their thoughts and movements in an accurate, refined manner,” he explains.

He points out that liberty work gives horsemen and women a better connection with and understanding of their horses, serving to improve their relationship and results together. The horse will learn how to balance and use his body properly, which translates into improved under-saddle work. Not to mention that it can be just plain fun!

PREPARING TO START

Gingerich advises doing homework before starting liberty work with your horse. Select an instructor for in-person and/or virtual learning. Watch liberty routines at shows, exhibitions and on videos and take note of what the human and horse are doing during their performance.

Find an appropriately sized work space, either a round pen, compact or subdivided arena, or a small, sturdy paddock. At first, work in-hand with your horse wearing a halter and lead. This provides more guidance and support as you start to learn how to communicate via body language what you would like your horse to do with you—move forward, stop, turn away or toward you, move around your body in a circle, change gaits, and so on. He explains that the way you move and angle your body, com-

bined with consistent verbal cues, signals your intention to your horse.

He also uses three types of whips (dressage, carriage and longe whips) to offer guidance and support to the horse. He often carries two whips at a time and uses them to deliver separate signals to different parts of the horse’s body. Gingerich has found that the weight and balance of the whip is very important for allowing the cues to be as understandable and consistent as possible.

“Whips are an important tool when learning liberty work with your horse,” he says. “They are simply an extension of my arms to help me to be more clear and precise with the cues that I give my horse. Their function is similar to how our hands and legs function while riding, in that they can correct when necessary, yet should always be used to communicate and show my horse how to move and use his body, and how to find connection, focus, and relaxation under pressure—both physical and environmental.”

Before using the whips in work with your horse, practice learning to carry and control one with each hand so you can reliably send individual signals with each whip. The whip cues are used along with body language to ask the horse to do different movements.

In planning for liberty work, you should also decide what types of rewards you plan to use to tell your horse that he has done a good job. The release of pressure at the correct time will always



Clinic student Laurie Ferguson does an in-hand mirroring trot circle, matching footsteps with her Quarter Horse Beau to help build connection. She is guiding him on where to put his feet and how to use and shape his body by matching the angle of her body with his.

help your horse understand what is being asked of him. Pats, rubs, scratches, and verbal praise are all excellent rewards, and different horses appreciate some of these more than others.

Gingerich does incorporate clicker training, a form of positive reinforcement that involves using food rewards, into his program as he starts to move into more advanced work. But he cautions against introducing treats too quickly or offering them with poor timing, as this can cause problems with your horse.

BODY LANGUAGE IS KEY

Gingerich emphasizes that understanding the body language of both horses and humans is one of the most important aspects of being able to work at liberty.

“We need to have a clear understanding of the difference between drive and draw with our horses, which is instinctual for them,” he says. “Applying energy and pressure to our horses with the correct angles and feel in our bodies—and knowing when and how to release that pressure—is essential for clear communication, understanding and connection.”

His first lessons involve teaching people how to differentiate between driving, drawing, and neutral energy in their own body language. He explains each term this way:

◆ **DRIVE** is the intention in the person’s body language that asks the horse to move away from the handler.

◆ **DRAW** is the intention conveyed by the person’s body that invites the horse to move toward the handler.

◆ **NEUTRAL ENERGY** is the handler holding his or her body in such a way that they do not ask the horse to change anything.

In most cases when working at liberty, Gingerich likes to be standing in a position by the horse’s head. This gives him a safer distance from the horse’s feet, and leaves more space between him and his horse, which allows him to communicate more easily since the horse is in a better position to see the cues he gives.

After teaching his students how to differentiate between drive, draw and neutral energy, Gingerich focuses on having them use these concepts to help their horses find connection, focus and relaxation.

Then he moves on to teaching body control. This involves the human learning how to use her body, and the whips, to show the horse how to move each part of his body independently, eventually without the need for a lead.

BASIC SKILLS

One of the first things Gingerich teaches a horse is to back away when he applies pressure to the

horse's chest from the front. This helps ensure that he can adjust how close the horse comes to him as he advances in his training.

From there, he teaches the horse how to move his shoulders, hindquarters and rib cage independently in response to his body language. These basic skills help transition into starting liberty circles, lateral work, straightness training and so on. Teaching the horse to come when called is an important skill, too.

Gingerich advises keeping the training sessions short in most cases, especially at the beginning. Although a lesson can range anywhere from 15 minutes to over an hour, depending on the horse's stage of training, 15 to 30 minutes is a good starting point.

He counsels to always try to end on a positive note with your horse. If the horse doesn't master a task that you've asked for, go back to the basic skill set and end with a successful completion.

SAFETY TIPS

As with any activity with horses, interacting safely is imperative in liberty work, too. Gingerich cautions to carefully read the horse's body language for signals telling you to back off. A horse may be feeling playful, frightened, confused, annoyed or claustrophobic, which could cause him to lash out in your direction.

"My general rule is, when in doubt, increase the distance at which I am working with a horse, so we both have more space to safely read and respond to each other, and communicate from there," says Gingerich.

To help you stay safe, he advises to first teach the horse that any part of his body you

intend to draw towards you later must first be yielded away from you when asked. He feels that this is important to help everyone involved stay safe and confident. He also says giving cues with a longer whip can remind the horse to keep a safe distance.

Gingerich sometimes advises a handler to revert to work using a halter and lead to enhance safety.

"Liberty work requires a high level of education and understanding from both horse and human, so there are times that I will recommend that a horse and human use tack to help improve clarity, consistency, and communication before going back to working at liberty," he says.

ADVANCED EXERCISES

Things to aspire to later in liberty work include teaching flying changes and to bow and rear on command. In his sessions with his own horses, they practice advanced movements such as straight-line flying lead changes, half-pass and pirouette at the canter, liberty spins, the cutting game, and a walking rear, among other cool moves.

With patience, practice and communication, you and your horse could dance like you mean it one day, too.

For more information about Luke Gingerich, visit www.gingerichhorsemanship.com or search YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. ■

For bonus first-person experiences from clinic participants, go to www.horseillustrated.com/liberty-clinic or snap the QR code at right.



Ferguson uses body language and two whips to shape Beau into an arc around her in the drawback liberty circle by using a combination of both "drive" and "draw" signals with different parts of her body.



PATH Finders

Equine-assisted therapy is helping the ever-growing number of Alzheimer's patients and their caregivers.

BY PAT RAIA

Tom Mannigel didn't know much about horses until his wife, Diane, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Thanks to an equine-assisted therapy program offered at a nearby PATH-certified facility (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International), he now knows first-hand that horses can be valuable collaborators when it comes to meeting stress and depression head on, as well as improving the pair's relationship.

"I'm not really a horse person," says Mannigel. "I grew up in rural California where everyone had horses, but every time I'd get on 'em, it was basically a disaster. However, after we took part in the program, things started to get better in our relationship."

INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS

The Mannigels took part in the Kids and Horses PATH program in Minden, Nev.

PATH-certified facilities, instructors and other professionals use equine-assisted therapies geared toward individuals who have special needs. Recently, programming at some PATH-certified facilities has diversified to include equine-assisted therapies for veterans and others coping with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Kids and Horses is just one of the PATH-sanctioned facilities that uses a program developed by Connected Horse to help individuals and their caregivers navigate the physical flood of emotions connected to the diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or other dementias.



After Leticia Metherell's mother Maria Merguido was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2017, Leticia has found huge benefits for both of them from the Connected Horse program.

COURTESY OF KIDS AND HORSES

"I was intrigued," says Cat O'Brien, Kids and Horses program director and a PATH-certified instructor. "I live in a community of retirees, and I believed it would be an asset to our facility."

According to Connected Horse co-founder Paula Hertel, MSW, combining the two programs has turned out to be a perfect fit.

"There is a mission alignment with many PATH barns and Connected Horse: We believe the horse/human connection provides benefits to both horse and participant," says Hertel. "We are advocating that Connected Horse is ideal for people with dementia because it doesn't require traditional verbal communication."

According to Hertel, the Connected Horse program focuses on mindfulness, emotional and sensory triggers, and understanding. Horses used in the program allow the person diagnosed with dementia and their caregiver all communicate on the same level.

"The horse is really the teacher," she says.

BENEFITS FOR CAREGIVERS

The horses had a profound impact on caregivers as well, as Hertel and co-founder Nancy Schier Anzelmo discovered in their program-connected research.

"Care partners often experience feelings of being overwhelmed, anxious, depressed and frustrated with the situation in which they find themselves," Schier Anzelmo explains. "The Connected Horse program helps the care partner and the person who has been diagnosed with the grief and depression that comes after an initial diagnosis."

In fact, those were exactly the emotions that swept over Leticia Metherell when her mother Maria Murguido was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2017.

"I don't know if you would call it depression, but there was a deep concern of losing my mother and the impacts this [diagnosis] would have on my family," recalls Metherell. Along with her mother, she took part in the Connected Horse program offered by Kids and Horses in June and July of 2022. "Also, perhaps a selfish part of me thought about my risks of getting Alzheimer's and what impact her diagnosis would have on my life."

In order to cope with her own feelings and those her parents were experiencing, Metherell scoured the internet for something that would provide meaningful activities for the pair. She came upon the Kids and Horses program during one of those searches.

"I was skeptical when I first attended the sessions because I didn't think they were going to make a long-term impact," she says. "I don't think I

really had a true understanding until I attended the program and experienced it for myself."

But she discovered that the horses taught the humans important things about communication and connection.

"There definitely is a form of communication happening between people and horses [that is] influenced by our own moods, body posture, attentiveness, and tone of voice," says Metherell. "The horses also communicate with us via their responses, whether they come to you, walk by your side of their own accord, or allow you to groom them. This is such an important lesson, because as the ability of my mother to communicate reduces as her disease progresses, these lessons help me understand that there will always be a connection there, and that a verbal interaction is not always necessary for it to be a deep and meaningful interaction."

PHYSICAL BENEFITS FOR PATIENTS

The PATH/Connected Horse synergy has physical benefits, too, says Tineke Jacobson, a physical therapist, PATH-registered therapist and hippotherapy clinical specialist at the Xenophon Therapeutic Riding Center in Orinda, Calif.

LOWERING YOUR RISK FACTORS

According to gerontologists, someone in the U.S. is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia every 65 seconds. Fortunately, there are things you can do now to help stave off a dementia diagnosis in later life, according to gerontologist Paula Hertel, co-founder of the Connected Horse program.

"Research shows that 40 percent of dementia can be avoided by focusing on risk factors," she says.

Here's what you can do:

◆ Stay physically active and consistent with exercise and light weight-training.

◆ Practice mindfulness and meditation techniques to avoid depression or cope with it when it does occur.

"If untreated, depression is a potential risk factor for dementia in later life," says Hertel.

◆ Practice using physical senses, including touch, smell and hearing in every human/equine interaction.

"We often say, 'Get out of your head and into your senses,'" she says.

◆ Use riding time to notice and fully appreciate nature, either on the trail or at the barn.

Finally, the same techniques can help when it's time to cope with any life-changing experience, whether a cancer diagnosis, a financial snarl or the death of someone close to you.

"Just being with the unconditional acceptance of the horses can be helpful," says Hertel. "Horses live in the moment, and they can teach you how wonderful that can be."



COURTESY OF CONNECTED HORSE

Connected Horse is ideal for people with dementia because it doesn't require traditional verbal communication.

Jacobson found the Connected Horse program in 2018 while searching for a program that was using horses to assist in the treatment of dementia.

"There was a growing interest in serving adults in our community when it became apparent that horses have exceptional talents with unmounted activities," she explains.

The Connected Horse program was a good fit for Xenophon, which already offered equine-assisted physical and occupational programs for children and adults.

Jacobson credits working with horses not only with an ability to emotionally lift people out of a depressed state, but she says that the physical benefits of the interactions between humans and horses are just as profound.

She remembers one person who took part in the Connected Horse program at Xenophon.

"His gait was characterized by slumped-over posture, looking at the ground, short stride length—all signs of decline due to aging, depression and maybe also dementia," Jacobson recalls. "When he was given the lead rope to walk with the horse, the horse did not respond to his cues of a verbal 'walk on.' Only when he straightened up, looked ahead, and made a

large, decisive stride after a deep inhale to expressively say 'walk on,' did the horse respond and walk with him wherever he wanted to go."

Whether its impact is physical or emotional, Metherell says that she will never forget what she learned from the horses at a very difficult time in her life and in the lives of her mother, father and other members of their family.

"Working with horses has helped bring me an emotional awareness, which helps deal with stress and feelings of sadness," says Metherell. "[This helps me] better understand nonverbal communication and find gratitude in my life. It's also a shared experience that [my mother and I] can both fall back on when times are hard, and reminds us each day of all the things we have to be grateful for."

Mannigel agrees.

"I really can't explain it, but [my relationship with my wife] has changed," he says. "I don't know if she's less anxious because I'm less stressed or if I have less stress because she's less anxious. All I know is that since we [worked] with the horses, our relationship is better." ■

PAT RAI A is a freelance writer based in Florida.

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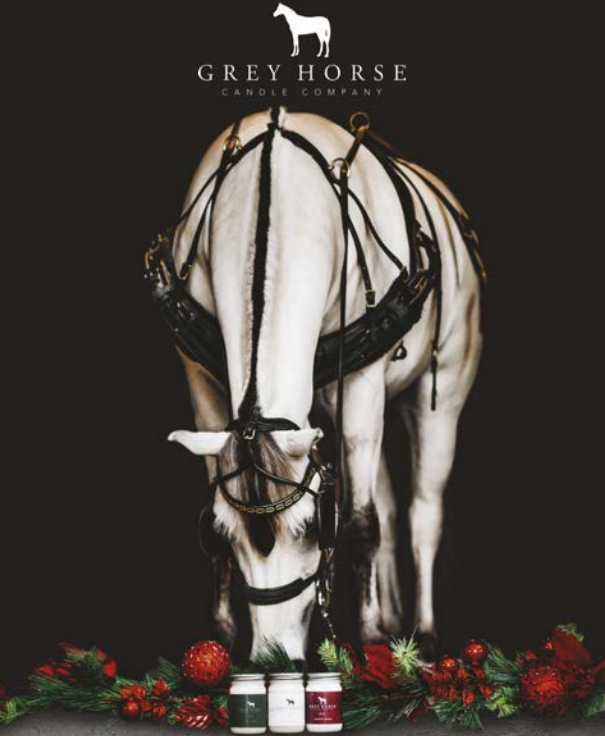
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Holiday MAGIC

The Lebanon, Ohio, Horse-Drawn Carriage Parade makes memories for the whole family every Christmas season.

BY KIM MACMILLAN

PHOTOS BY MACMILLAN PHOTOGRAPHY/KIM & ALLEN MACMILLAN



Roscoe the Belgian from Voss Run Farms in Cincinnati, Ohio, pulls a wagon full of Christmas revelers. Voss Run Farm, which has been operating for 50 years, is owned by Heidi and Gary Voss. (All photos taken at the Lebanon, Ohio 2021 Horse-Drawn Carriage Parade.)



Draft mules Tom and John pull a wheelchair-accessible wagon, built by Thomas Welding in Georgetown, Ohio, driven by Gorman Heritage Farm Harness Club member Jenny Simonton.

Much like Dr. Seuss's fictional town of Whoville, the small city of Lebanon, Ohio, magically transforms into a holiday wonderland when their Horse-Drawn Carriage Parade and Christmas Festival ushers in the season the first Saturday in December. The charming and historic Midwestern city, with a population of about 21,000, has been hosting this exceedingly festive equestrian event for over 30 years.

On that first Saturday in December, Lebanon hosts over 100 parade entries, all of them pulled by equines, and over 100,000 visitors who flock in early to claim their spot to view the horses and carriages. There are two parade times: a daylight parade at 1 p.m. and a twinkle-light one at 7 p.m. The entire city gets into the spirit with entertainment, wagon rides, a living nativity, a craft and food fair, visits with Santa, happenings at the library and local churches, and more.

Two oh-so-cute donkey cart entries from the Stewart Family Farm are driven by young family members. According to mom Cathy Stewart, their farm has mules, donkeys, horses and airplanes!



Ron Crist driving his family's six-horse Haflinger hitch pulling an original Earl George show wagon in the afternoon parade.

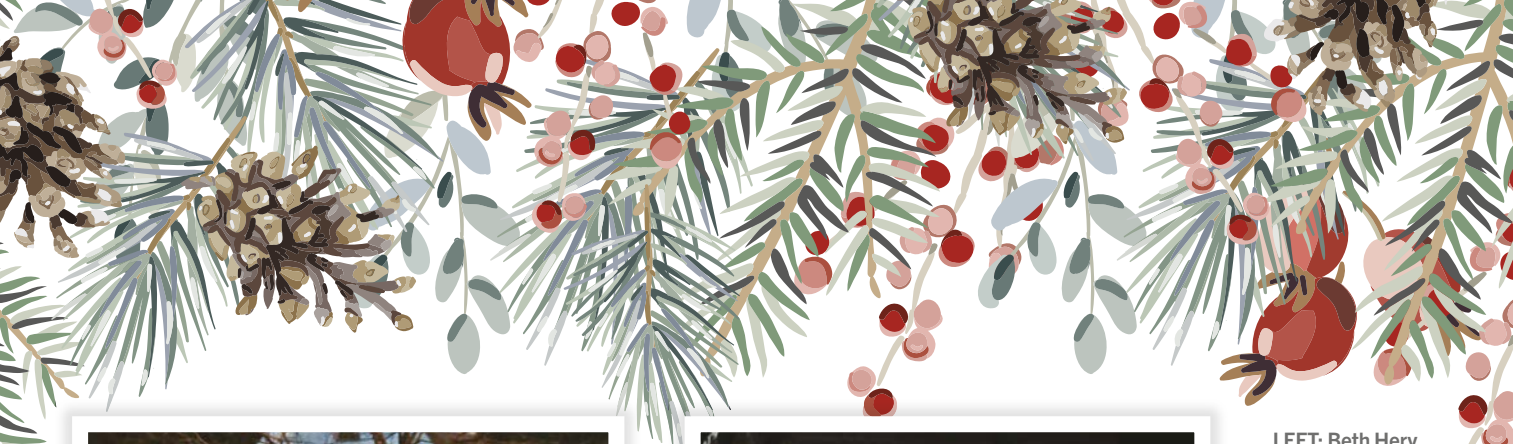


The parade features all sizes and breeds of equines, ranging from draft horses to Minis, as well as donkeys and mules, pulling a wide array of horse-drawn conveyances. All rigs must pass a pre-parade safety check and be accompanied by grooms walking alongside.

HUMBLE BEGINNING

Pat South, who was the Lebanon Chamber of Commerce president when the idea for a parade came up in the late 1980s, explains how it started.

“We wanted to establish some holiday events in beautiful downtown Lebanon to showcase the businesses around town and to entertain,” she says. “In 1988, we had a trial run, thinking that we liked the idea of horse-drawn carriages, and had a small event with maybe eight horses. The next year, we decided that we had hit on something and had our first official parade. We wanted it to be all horse-drawn carriages; we didn’t want any other types of entries. We had 15 or 20 units that first year and a crowd of maybe 15,000.”



LEFT: Beth Hery drives her 12-year-old Morgan gelding Bear to a late 1800s Demarest Surry in the evening parade.

RIGHT: This adorable mini donkey sports a “Rudolph-esque” red nose and is driven by Cathy Stewart of Stewart Family Farm.



A 19-year-old Standardbred gelding named Velvet driven by owner Janice Panek of Fayetteville, Ohio. Velvet was adopted through New Vocations Racehorse Adoption Program. The carriage is an Amish surrey.



A Cinderella carriage pulled by a 20-hand Percheron gelding, owned by Russ Rager of Martinsville, Ohio, was driven by Michelle Cain.



A surrey with fringe on top is pulled by a Paint Horse named Toby representing Heavenward Farm and Horsemanship of Morrow, Ohio. The driver is Heavenward Executive Director Carole Bower, with Assistant Program Director Jaime Reeves walking alongside.

South credits city officials and local law enforcement for their wonderful support of the event and explains how the festival evolved into what it is today.

“The next few years, the spectator attendance climbed by 10,000 or more each year, and then at some point it jumped up to near 100,000 by 1992,” she says. “By [that point], our parade entries had climbed to near 40 and it just continued from there. The town picked up the theme of decorating with miniature white

lights downtown, so at nightfall, it looked like glittery stars and glistening icicles. It was an instant success.”

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Located in the rolling hills of southwestern Ohio about halfway between Dayton and Cincinnati, Lebanon’s streets are decked with holiday decorations on parade day. Festival visitors can check names off their holiday shopping lists at boutique shops and antique stores.



Finch Creek Farms LLC's black Percheron geldings, Larry and Lyle, driven by Katie Finkes-Turner, pulling a "people mover" wagon. Finch Creek Farms (Xenia, Ohio) patriarch Reinhold Finkes had rave reviews for this dashing pair. "We've been in the parade for 23 years with total of 16 horses, but these two are pretty special."



Hafingers Patty and Casey are driven by Garth Louth in the evening parade. The horses are owned by the Alvie Louth family of Rockford, Ohio, who custom-built the red, white and blue wagon.

Planning Your Trip

- ◆ The parade is free and open to the public, although reserved box seating near the viewing stand can be purchased.
- ◆ Local volunteers wearing green vests will be on duty for crowd control and to answer questions.
- ◆ Free public parking lots and on-street parking is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Some local businesses and charities offer prime pay-to-park spots as well.
- ◆ Make hotel and dining reservations well in advance of parade day.
- ◆ Arrive early for the best viewing opportunities. Bring chairs and blankets and dress for the weather.
- ◆ Download parking and parade route maps ahead of time: www.lebanonchamber.org/carriage-parade



The Olde Tyme Clydesdale six-horse hitch has been participating in the Lebanon Parade for 28 years. Driven by owner Deborah Bechstein, the lead horses in the hitch are (from the driver's perspective) Lila, left side, age 4, and Mona, right side, age 10. Swing horses are Lola, left side, age 7, and Molly, right side, age 13. The wheelers are Leanie, left side, age 4, and 8-year-old Finn, the only gelding in the hitch, on the right.



Food vendors offer tempting treats, including peppermint frozen custard, hot chocolate, kettle corn and roasted almonds.

History buffs will delight in seeing the circa-1803 Golden Lamb Inn, which has hosted the likes of Charles Dickens and at least 12 U.S. presidents, and the Greek Revival-style Glendower Mansion, built in 1836, both swathed in full holiday garb.

And what of Seuss's Mr. Grinch, the curmudgeonly character who crept into Whoville

to steal Christmas in the story? If parade goers look closely, they are likely to see him riding in one of the carriages along with cheerfully waving Santa and Mrs. Claus in another. It's all part of the horsey holiday fun! ■

KIM MacMILLAN has been reporting on equestrian sports, agriculture, science, travel and history for over 35 years. She and her husband, Allen, who is a professional photographer, have covered multiple World Equestrian and Olympic Games.



Diana Dumford of Oxford, Ohio, brought her two white Miniature Horses, Missy and Chief, decked in full holiday regalia.



Dr. Seuss' Grinch rides on the back of a cart pulled by miniature donkey Festus, driven by his owner Kristina Valentine. They represented the Clark County Chapter of the Ohio Horseman's Council.

the STANDBRED

Much more than just a racehorse, the gentle-natured Standardbred also pulls its weight under saddle in a variety of disciplines.

BY ANNA SOCHOCKY

Today's harness racing trotters and pacers can do a lot more than pull a sulky at high speeds. Standardbreds retiring from off the track suit riders of all levels in disciplines ranging from dressage and barrel racing to fox hunting and reining.

MORE THAN A RACEHORSE

Helene Gregory grew up riding Standardbreds in Sweden. Though she and her husband, Jeff Gregory, a well-known harness racing trainer and driver, breed these horses to race, Helene developed an obsession with this often overlooked breed.

"I'm a big advocate for getting these horses when they're done on the track," Helene says. "I like to pursue new careers, and they're so good at it. The sky is the limit."

Standardbreds can also be found at the higher echelons of competitive equestrian sport. In 2007, the United States Trotting Association (USTA) breed registry began accepting applications for Standardbreds and their riders interested in performing in a breed demonstration at the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games in Lexington, Ky. Eight horse-and-rider pairs were selected, with backgrounds in dressage, hunter/jumper, endurance, and western riding.

"Standardbreds enjoy working," says Helene. "They do anything you ask of them, and do it eagerly. They are the blue-collar workers of the equine breeds."

BREED HISTORY

A melting pot of equine bloodlines, the Standardbred's origins begin with a gray Thoroughbred



CODY/ADORE STOCK

Standardbreds race either in a regular trot or a pace (shown), where the legs on each side of the body move together instead of in diagonal pairs.





COURTESY NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

New York City Police officer Kyle McLaughlin and his Standardbred mount, Blaze, look out for traffic in Times Square.

stallion named Messenger, foaled in England in 1780. Imported to the United States eight years later in 1788, Messenger stood at stud for 20 seasons and demonstrated an unparalleled ability to sire trotters in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York.

Though Messenger was bred to produce athletic and speedy horses, it would be his great-grandson, Hambletonian 10, who ignited the spark for the Standardbred breed and claims the title of foundation sire.

Hambletonian 10 sired over 1,300 offspring. A mix of breeds were introduced into his line, including Thoroughbreds, Morgans, Canadian pacers, and other pacing and trotting horses.

Bred in two lines—trotters and pacers—Standardbreds introduced racing to the everyday person. Races between neighbors and

village roads soon blossomed in major cities where locals cleared streets for rivalries.

Gaited pacers run in a two-beat lateral gait, moving legs on the same side in unison. Trotters race in the traditional diagonal gait, moving opposite pairs of legs together.

The National Association of Trotting Horse Breeders created the Standardbred's official registry in 1879. The Association's requirement for the breed required that a horse be able to trot or pace a mile in 2 minutes and 30 seconds. This "standard" led to the name Standardbred.

FROM TRACK TO PATROL

The unruffled personality of the Standardbred is well-suited to many professions, including police mounts. Mounted horse patrols can be found riding drafts and draft-crosses in many cities across the United States, but in Newark, N.J., the breed of choice is the Standardbred.

Officer Luis Camacho is the instructor and trainer for officers in the department's mounted patrol. Working with the Standardbred Retirement Foundation, Camacho helps adopt and retrain surrendered horses for police work.

"We stick to the same build and color of the horses to maintain uniformity of the patrol," says Camacho. "We want to look the same every day to the community. The Standardbred has a consistent temperament needed to perform police work. It's a sturdy horse and tends to accept the city environment."

Newark Police mounted officers patrol residential neighborhoods, business districts, and community events like parades, festivals, and concerts because they can cover more ground than a team of officers on foot.

"We're in a city, so it's very noisy," Camacho explains. "EMS ambulances, buses, you name it, they hear it. I think it helps to work with horses coming off the track because they're not sitting for a long time in a stall."

Mounted patrol officers receive six weeks of training. Riding instruction and basic horsemanship protocols, including primary care and feeding of the horse, prepare them for a partnership with their assigned mount.

ANYTHING BUT STANDARD

A Standardbred makes a wonderful choice for novice riders who may choose the trail or casual riding over the competition ring. The average height for the breed is 14.2 to 15.3 hands, and a weight of 900 to 1,000 pounds means they are smaller than Thoroughbreds and warmbloods. This can make them more accessible for timid riders who prefer a smaller mount.



BOB LANGRISH

More and more Standardbreds can be seen in the dressage, hunter/jumper and eventing disciplines.

Although the breed sports a robust and durable body type, their calm temperament, high tolerance for rider mistakes, and willingness to please people outshines all its physical attributes.

Mary Minkoff is a longtime board member and volunteer at Sunshine Horses, Inc., one of the leading Standardbred Aftercare Facilities in New York State. She also owns a Standardbred named Hucklebuck (aka "Huck"), and believes the thinking that these horses can only succeed on the track is outdated.

"The breed has the potential to excel in any discipline," says Minkoff. "People realize that they don't need to have a Thoroughbred or a Quarter Horse to do a particular job."

While at first glance they may seem to sport a plain brown wrapper, the Standardbred's athleticism, calm temperament, and willingness to please their riders make them worth a second look. ■

ANNA SOCHOCKY is a writer, instructor and rider based in Santa Fe, N.M. Visit her online at equi-libris.com.

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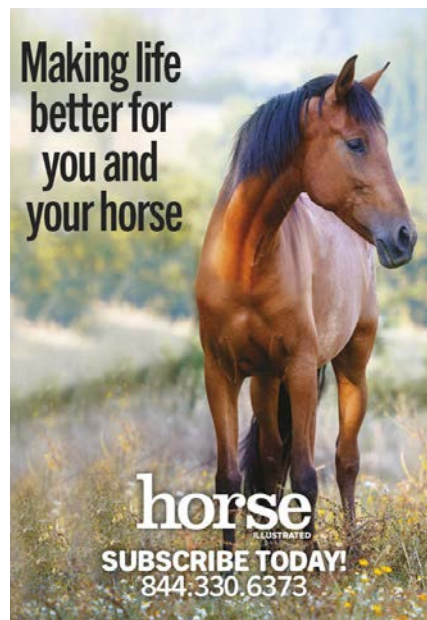
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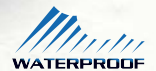
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