COMPLIMENTARY

SONOMA COUNTY

HORSE JOURNAL

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Sonoma County Horse Journal

Six-Time American Horse Publications National Award Winner

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SONOMA COUNTY
HORSE JOURNAL

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Home of The Equus Awards

VOLUME 21 | ISSUE 4 | FALL 2024

4 CONTRIBUTORS

5 PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

6 NEWS & NEWSWORTHY

10 LITTLE BITTY RIDERS
BY PATTI SCHOFLER



14 HEARTS WILD FOR WILD HORSES
BY DANIELLE JACOBS



16 EQUESTRIAN FRIENDLY HOLIDAY GIFTS

18 EAST MEETS WEST

22 10 FAMOUS AMERICAN HORSES
BY HEATHER COX RICHARDSON

30 MY HORSES IS TOO SKINNY WHAT SHOULD I DO?
BY MICHELLE BEKO DVM





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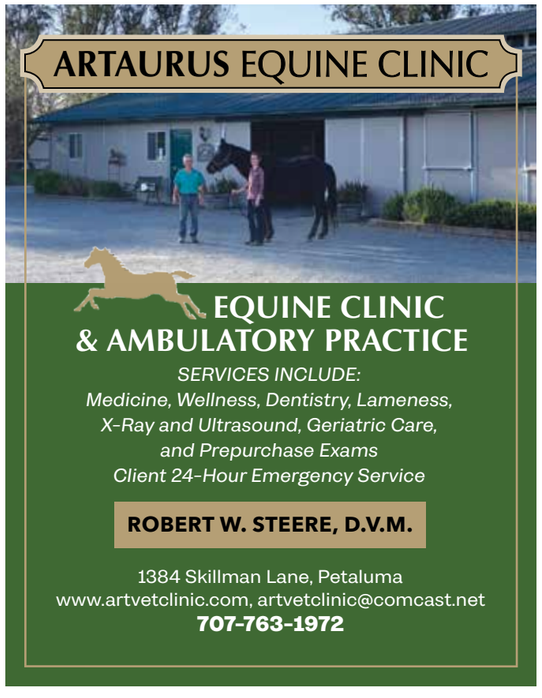




President's Message



JOHN O'HARA PHOTOGRAPHY

What a terrific summer we have had, with many equine activities, competitions, and trail rides. This summer the folks at the Sonoma County Fair were so entertained by the Sonoma County Horse Council (SCHC) Carousel of Horses, which featured our county's riders and horses. We hosted a summer barbeque at the Wine Country Polo Club grounds in Santa Rosa. It was a beautiful afternoon with great catering by Kevin and Sonja Vincent plus crew from Smokestack BBQ. With tournament polo games as a backdrop, everyone enjoyed a wonderful time. Many thanks to Karen and Victor Trione for their hospitality and use of the venue.

As a general policy, SCHC does not take positions on political issues. We are committed to providing information that supports the equine way of life and its commercial base here in the North Bay.

On the November ballot is the Sonoma County initiative Measure J promoted by The Coalition to End Factory Farming, a group listing forty-nine organizations as members. Driving the coalition is a Berkeley-based Direct Action Everywhere (DxE), probably the greatest single voice.

DxE made headlines when they organized mass protests in Petaluma at poultry producers' ranches and trespassing under the guise of rescuing animals that were being "maltreated." Many were arrested and prosecuted by the County of Sonoma for their illegal actions and behaviors.

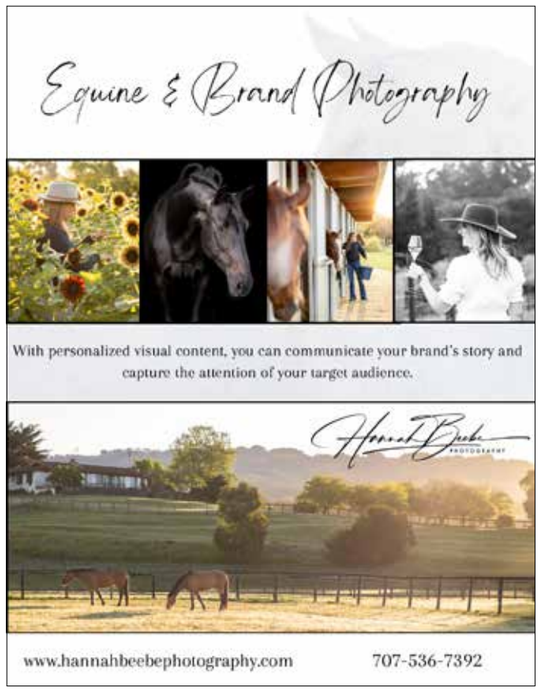
DxE is a proponent of Rose's Law or the Animal Bill of Rights. This proposed law includes the following, excerpted from www.roseslaw.org:

- The right to be free - not owned - or to have a guardian acting in their best interest.
- The right to not be exploited, abused, or killed by humans.
- The right to have their interests represented in court and protected by the law.
- The right to a protected home, habitat, or ecosystem.
- The right to be rescued from situations of distress and exploitation.

Measure J wants to end "factory farming" and uses the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) definitions of what constitutes affected operations. While horses are listed on the EPA's Confined Animal Feeding Operation list, the minimum size that might be considered for control is 150 animals, which is essentially irrelevant for equine interests in Sonoma County. But, if Measure J passes, look at the points outlined above in the Animal Bill of Rights.

So, while the SCHC is not taking an active position on Measure J, I suggest that horse owners look carefully at this initiative and vote accordingly. I believe that this needs to be headed off at the pass before we have something on our hands that can't be stopped.

Here's to a great fall season for all!
Henry Beaumont





ON THE COVER
PHOTO BY HANNAH BEEBE
Our contributing photographer has the best models at home: her son Weston and his pony Goliath.

SHOW FOR THE YEAR

The Vintage Cutting Horse Association (VCHA) 2024 cutting series holds the final competition on October 19 at the Petaluma Riding and Driving Club. The club's awards banquet celebrates on November 2 at Tomrose Ranch, Santa Rosa. For information on VCHA and the events, contact info@vchacutting.com or visit www.vchacutting.com



Stacey Powers and Rebels Primo Hija working at a recent Sandy Bonelli clinic at PRDC

PHOTO BY PATTI SCHOFLER

OUR PONY CLUB BRILLIANCE

The Petaluma Sonoma Coastal EqusTraining Center Pony Club team glowed on the national stage when they competed in the summer at the United States Pony Club National Championships at Kentucky Horse Park. Eight members and five horses traveled to Lexington, KY, with three members making up a dressage team, two members on an eventing team, and three quiz competitors. In all competitive divisions, the local Pony Club won first place in Training Level dressage (team), second place in Beginner Novice eventing (team), first place in upper level quiz (team), second place in beginner level quiz (team). Individuals were awarded a first in freestyle dressage Training Level, Best Turned Out competitor, and Best Connemara (dressage). "With around 500 competitors, we are more than thrilled with the results," said Nathalie Guion-Buechley, Pony Club coach.



Left to right standing: Susan Noonan, Sara Ransick, Audrey Ryan, Marie-Charlotte Guion-Buechley, Nina Koelmeyer, Ally Nielsen, Meghan Hill, and Erika Slkarer
Left to right kneeling: Laerke Mikkelsen and Nathalie Guion

BARBIER ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM

Author and world-wide clinician **Dominique Barbier** comes home to his own Barbier Farms in Dry Creek Valley to present SYMPOSIUM XXIII on October 18-20.

Riders and auditors will immerse into French classical dressage training, Lusitano horses, California wine, and French humor. The weekend includes twice-daily lectures by Dominique, followed by question-and-answer sessions. Saturday night involves an exposition by the riders of Barbier Farm, a champagne reception on the deck, and dinner in the barn catered by Tianna Barbier and Dancing Horse Events. For information about the event at 5943 Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg, contact Debra Barbier at 707-696-2828 or barbierfarm@aol.com.

OLYMPIAN TEACHES IN SONOMA

U.S. dressage Olympian and 2024 Olympic team chef d'equipe **Christine Traurig** will clinic at Sanbar Dressage, 6529 Lakeville, Petaluma on October 26 and 27. Auditors are welcome. www.sanbardressage.com

HOLIDAY SHOPPING FROM LOCAL ARTISANS

Join over 30 local artisans and vendors for holiday shopping and cheer at the Chocolate Cloud Holiday Fair, offering home decor to holiday cards and ceramics to culinary treats for everyone on your list.

Chocolate Cloud Holiday Fair
Saturday, December 7, from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Flying Cloud Farm, 1200 Jacobsen Lane, Petaluma



CELEBRATING A LONG FRIENDSHIP

BY CHRIS MUDGE

Together over 25 years, my Morgan mare, Indiana Dar La Vuelta, and I have added up our ages to 100 this year which entitled us to perform The Dressage Foundation Century Ride before a dressage judge and a crowd of friends.

I began riding when I was forty years old. Today, I'm 72, and Selene is 28, qualifying us to join the Century Club, formed in 1996. Today, 765 horse and rider teams from across the country have joined the Century Club.

Because a full moon was shining when I first met her, I call her Selene, after the lunar goddess of the Greeks. She was bred by Sonoman Joan Zeleny and trained by my good friend, the late Gwen Stockebrand. When I was originally looking for a horse partner, I was keen on trail riding and completing a Training Level dressage test. With the help of our trainers before and today with Elena Bass, Selene far surpassed these expectations.

A quarter century has challenged both the mare and me. Selene has had more than her share of medical problems, including a surgical clip of her right hind angular ligament, colic surgery, pituitary pars intermedia dysfunction, metabolic disease, and a severe episode of laminitis. But, with the help of my farrier RT Goodrich and equine veterinarians Dr. Robert Steere and Dr. Jim Myers and a year with stall rest, Selene made a full recovery. I suspect, too, that her recovery was due to my mare's heart of gold and unflagging work ethic.

I have had my own health problems with atrial fibrillation and supraventricular tachycardia that required six ablations and a mini maze procedure. I'm not sure I would still be alive if not for my cardiologist, Dr. Jonathan Zaroff.

In the summer of 2024, at the Sue Curry Memorial Dressage Show at Fairwind Farm, our Century Ride came true. The experience was exhilarating; thanks to Debbie Wiegmann, friends, and family for making it even more fantastic.



THE TIME OF A LIFETIME

BY JACLYN PEPPER-MILLARD

We did it. With special luck and hard work, we qualified to compete at the USEF/Markel Festival of Champions in the Developing Prix St Georges National Championships. This was a huge stretch goal for us this season, and I was thrilled to be invited. Of course, we would go to this iconic dressage event and shoot for the time of a lifetime.

To qualify for this championship, we needed to make the top 15 ranked horse and rider combinations with an average score of at least 69 percent. Not only did we achieve this, but we also made it to the final qualification rankings in the top 10 against several Olympians.

Marsha Busekist's mare KWPN-N.A. Limited Edition, who we know as Ellie, and I flew off on August 17 for a week of competition at Lamplight Equestrian Center in Wayne, IL.

Our ten-day trip started with loading Ellie onto a FedEx crate at the Oakland International Airport for her flight to Chicago. The horses arrived midnight on Saturday and spent Sunday relaxing with lots of hand walking to loosen up those tight muscles from jet lag. On Monday, my coach for 13 years, Volker Brommann, arrived so we could really get this party started.

Easy training on Monday and Tuesday got us back into the swing of things. On Wednesday, the real work began when alongside Volker, we worked with Anne Gribbons, USDF Hall of Fame member, FEI 5* judge, and international trainer and competitor. With Anne's incredible experience and Volker's eye for detail, Ellie and I were ready for Thursday's first day of competition.

JOGGING INTO THE OFFICIAL SPOT

The official jog in hand before a panel of judges and vets was held Wednesday evening during the competitor opening party. It was quite exciting that we were officially accepted into the competition.

On Thursday, the day we had been planning for all year, I was nervous, but in a good way. Over my years of competing, I have finally mastered channeling my nervous energy into a positive energy that I can channel into focus and determination.

We drew as the last ride time in our class at the end of the competition day. Most of the day, I cared for Ellie and reviewed exactly how I would ride the test. I practiced visualizing what to do if things didn't go according to plan and what to do if things were working. Then, on went my headphones with my workout music to get me excited, and I braided Ellie's mane. We were spit-shined and ready to roll. Our warm-up was perfect.

ELLIE IS ON FIRE

Ellie was on fire in the best way possible. I have never ridden a horse that wants to compete and win as badly as she does. Mares are so special in that way; if they trust in you and give you their hearts, they truly will do anything for you.

It was our time to go in the arena. I took a deep breath, scratched Ellie on the neck, and said, "let's go do this." We cantered in around the outside of the arena, and the bell quickly rang. I took a second to walk and take a deep breath before picking up the canter to enter down the centerline.

Our test went off without a single problem. I got to the final ride down centerline completely out of breath. I saluted. Tears streamed down my face.

I could not believe we just pulled that off. Months and months of incredibly hard work and we were able to pull it off exactly to plan. I could not be prouder of our team in this moment. On day one, we ended fifth in the rankings.

The FEI Prix St Georges test counted for 40 percent of our overall total for the competition, and we needed to be fifth over ten in the rankings.

On Friday, we had an easy training day, checking in with Anne one more time before she left.

DRAWS END OF CLASS

I woke up on Saturday, the final day of the competition, and could not believe it was already here. It is amazing how you work so hard for so long at something, and then it is here and gone in the blink of an eye. We were to ride the FEI Developing Prix St Georges test, which would count for 60 percent of our overall score. We again drew a ride time towards the end of the class on Saturday morning.

I studied my plan in my head many times, ensuring I was prepared for all outcomes. Volker warmed me up, his voice as always comforting in my ear. I am always nervous until I get in the saddle and get to work. Then my instincts take over, my body knows what to do, and my mind becomes quiet.

Ellie felt incredible, even more relaxed, more powerful, and most importantly, more with me than on Thursday.

As we entered on centerline, I was washed by this overwhelming sense of gratitude. My dreams were coming true.

And we laid down another incredible test. We had one small bobble due to miscommunication in the three tempi changes, but other than that the quality was the best we had ever produced in the show arena. The amount of power and cadence in the trot work was unbelievable. I finished the final halt salute and could not believe again what we had been able to accomplish. This test raised our final ranking to a fourth-place finish. To be ranked amongst the best in the country on a horse that I trained myself is truly the most special thing I have ever experienced.

Our time in Chicago was not only incredibly special because of the hard work we put in and the results we produced but also because we witnessed firsthand the powerhouse that is dressage in the USA, alive and well.

The number of US-bred horses at this completion was incredible. Top horses were being bred here in the USA and trained here by our talented riders. I am so thankful to be riding one of those. Look out for what we will produce in the years leading up to the 2028 Olympics.

Thank you so much to everyone who supported me on this incredible journey and believed in me from the beginning. It truly means the world to me. I hope to continue to make you all proud.

SCHC YOUTH FUND

Thank you to M.J. Wickham and Todd Kaplan for their generous donation of seed money for the **Sonoma County Horse Council Youth Fund**. Recipients may use the funds for just about anything a kid could need to further their equestrian dreams, including helmets, show clothes, lessons, clinics, trailering to events, and show fees. Applications are on the SCHC website or reach out to **Tracy Underwood** at 707-975-2097 with any questions.

PRDC Drill Team Wins Big Time



2024 Horse Expo Drill Team Competition Awards

- Overall Champions
- Horse Expo Mixed Team Champion
- Horse Expo Quad Team Champion
- CSHA Mixed Team Champion
- CSHA Quad Team Champion
- Stall Decoration Contest Themed Champion

DRESSAGE CLINIC WITH JAKI HARDY & KATY MARTIN FOR JUNIORS & YOUNG RIDERS

The **Sonoma Chapter of California Dressage Society** is hosting a dressage clinic with Jaki Hardy & Katy Martin for juniors & young riders on Sunday, November 3 at Kildarra Equestrian Center in Santa Rosa. The clinic price is $25. For more information or to sign up to ride, contact Katie Kunde at katie.kunde@gmail.com.

LITTLE BITTY RIDERS

BY PATTI SCHOFLER

Some people claim they were born with a horse addiction. As little ones, they begged their families to let them touch a horse, have a pony, or sit atop a horse. The sensible adults in the picture then had to wrestle with the many questions about when to say "Not yet" and when to finally say "Let's do it."

Many roads to Rome provide answers about when, how, where, and with who to best start youngsters riding. Inevitably, those questions are met with many, often conflicting, answers and opinions. To clarify the topics, we turned to professional trainer Marian Nelson, who has extensive experience starting children with horses.

Marian's own father had no idea what to do about his little daughter, who walked around holding a halter to make her look like a horse rider. When the family moved from Los Angeles to Northern California, Marian claimed that her parents should feel bad because they made her move. The only way to repair the problem was for them to give her a horse for graduation.

"Finally, Dad gave in," says Marian, "and we looked at this little horse for $400. I was almost eighteen. He figured one summer of my supporting the horse would fix me." Well, that didn't work.

Even no surprise to herself, Marian started teaching at Dickson Ranch in Woodacre 57 years ago when she was 18. Today, she focuses on hunters, jumpers, equitation, and ponies at all levels at Sonoma Horse Park in Petaluma.

Marian loves educating young children about horsemanship and riding.

Here, she shares her approach toward the little riders.

At What Age Should A Child Start Riding?

There is no age. Four or five is perfect, but I've started kids as young as three. It depends on the child's athletic ability and willingness. Bring the child to the barn to be around a horse. See if the child likes and is interested. If not, wait until when it is interested.

What Is Positive About A Little One Riding?

At their young age, riding horses teaches them strength, balance, and love of animals. It's not just about riding. It's about learning responsibility and care for animals. To me, horsemanship is just as important. The more they are around the horses, the more comfortable and confident they are.



Nora, who is three-years-old, began riding Sierra last year with the help of her mom, Aine Minihane-Smith. PHOTO BY PATTI SCHOFLER

LEFT: Lisa Bacon and her son Jackson have a magical ride at Doran Regional Park in Bodega Bay. PHOTO BY HANNAH BEEBE

How Do You Teach Them?

Some kids are more athletic than others. some are more naturally balanced, and some are less afraid than others. Everybody is individual, and you have to work with each child individually within the realm of what they're capable of, and one day might be different than the next. One day Simone Biles falls off the balance bar.

You must be positive and happy and encourage them.

The horses must be gentle, very kind, and patient with the little ones. I like well-schooled ponies because they're lower to the ground.

All my children must wear safety vests, safety helmets, and regular riding shoes.

We start on the longe line with walk, stop, and turn. I don't ever let anybody off a line until I really feel they're capable of controlling a horse. Right now, I have a little six-year-old on the longe line trotting over poles.

I teach them how to properly lead a horse and how to groom.



Elle loves Cricket



Weston and his pony Goliath



Cora and Penelope are with their favorite pony, Apache

Horsemanship is very important. Do you know what is in your hands? (Reins) What are on your feet? (Stirrups) What holds the saddle on? (Girth) What's in the horse's mouth? (Bit) Can you name a part of the horse? I ask them where to stand next to the horse and where not to stand. Why do they not stand there? Why do they always walk in front of horses? I don't care what it is. It can be simple, but they must learn horsemanship.

Do The Kids Ever Cry?

I've had some crying. I help by talking about safety. Horses are herd animals and don't intentionally hurt anyone. It's okay to be scared, and you let me know if you're scared, if you don't feel well, or if you're apprehensive. Then let's talk about it.

If the child doesn't want to get on, I'll say that's fine. Let's just give a horse a carrot. Let's just pet a horse. Sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't work, but I will never force a child to get on.

I've always tried to be very positive in my teaching and training so that the child leaves with a good attitude. If somebody should fall off or have a bad day, I always call the parents and say it's okay.

How Do The Parents Step In?

I once had a dad who constantly told his kid what to do with a pony during the lesson. I had to stop him. He needed to be a parent, not a teacher.

Anything Negative About Youngsters Riding?

I have a person at my barn who started when she was seven-years-old, and she is now in her 50s. We laughed because she has some pictures and videos of herself riding horses like she shouldn't have in those days, right? There is nothing negative about someone riding a horse.



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Hearts Wild for Wild Horses

BY DANIELLE JACOBS

American Mustang – these words evoke thoughts of freedom, tenacity, heart, and an unbridled wildness. The very sight of this horse can elicit feelings of romance and mystery.

For the uninitiated, these equines bring questions and concerns. Could I handle a Mustang? Once gentled, what can Mustangs do? Wild Heart Restart Ranch aims to answer those questions with a resounding "Yes!" and "Mustangs have endless abilities!"

With this passion and belief, Hilary Hansen founded the nonprofit Wild Heart Restart Ranch in 2020. She was always involved with horses, claiming she was riding before she could make noise, but upon watching the 2011 movie, "Wild Horse, Wild Ride," she knew she had to devote her life to this icon of America.

While Wild Heart Restart Ranch "is a place for Off the Track Thoroughbreds, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Mustangs, and any soul who needs a restart in life" (www.wildheartrestartranch.org), the Mustang is at the heart of this organization. The goal is to adopt, gentle, and find perfect partners for Mustangs. Their hope is to send each horse out proudly into the world as a brand ambassador for BLM Mustangs.

As of March 1, 2024, the BLM estimates there are approximately 73,520 federally protected wild horses and burros on BLM-managed public lands that are managed in 177 herd management areas (HMA) across 10 western states. In California, there are 21 wild horse and burro herd management areas on approximately 2.5 million acres. The HMAs cover the eastern length of the state with Red Rocks Lake HMA in the north, nearly at the Oregon border, to the Chocolate Mule Mountains HMA near the Mexican border. (https://www.blm.gov/whb)

The women of Wild Heart Restart Ranch strive to be part of the solution for the many challenges facing the American Mustang. Sonya Hollander, a board member, stated, "We are here to lead by example to show people that Mustangs can do the same as other horses." They do this by adopting, gentling, and rehoming three to four Mustangs a year.

Mustang mare Dory is Hilary's current adoptee and is among a list of over 14 Mustangs she has taken on. The four-year-old was gathered from the Twin Peaks HMA, approximately 25 miles northeast of Susanville, California. She arrived at the ranch in October 2023.

In July, Dory and Hilary participated in the Mustang Champions Western Challenge Vegas 2024 at the South Point Arena in Las Vegas where they competed in ranch riding, trail class, and reining. Particularly given the fact that she only had 55 rides on Dory prior to the Challenge, Hilary was extremely pleased with how they did. She credits Dory's success to her great support system and the adaptability, versatility, and intelligence of the American Mustang.

The Mustang Challenge in Las Vegas is a western competition. However, Jess Merget, Wild Heart board member, emphasized that Mustangs can excel in any discipline. To showcase this fact, Wild Heart is excited to present the Mustang Showcase, an all-discipline, all-breed show to demonstrate that Mustangs can be just as successful as Thoroughbreds, Quarter Horses, Warmbloods, or any other breed.

Sonoma County is home to many horse rescue organizations. Wild Heart is set apart not only by their devotion to and belief in Mustangs but also by their success with difficult horses in general. Jess spoke positively about their partnership with other local rescues, noting that "other rescues come to us when they have a difficult case."

Who is the right new person for a Mustang? "First, we want someone who will carry on the brand ambassador," said Hilary. "Someone who is going to get out and do things with their Mustang."

The amount of horse experience depends on the horse. "It is important that you have a support structure in place for you and your new Mustang," said Hilary. "Wild Heart hopes to be part of that support, always welcoming Mustangs back for tune-ups.

"Most crucial, though, is the connection between the person and the individual Mustang, that magic some of us are lucky enough to experience when we look into a horse's eyes and feel that click and assurance in our gut that this is the right one."

The Board Members of Wild Heart Restart Ranch - Hilary Hansen (founder), Jess Merget, Sonya Hollander, Kelly Hansen, Lindsay Merget, and Gina Ruth - joyfully introduce new owners to the American Mustang. Dory, among a few others, who are available for sale. Available horses and burros also are listed at https://wildhorseonline.blm.gov/. Further, Wild Heart Restart Ranch is always available to support and guide new owners of Mustang to success.

Mustangs will be found in action, excelling at various disciplines, at the Mustang Showcase on Saturday, November 16, at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds. Plan to just attend or bring your horse (open to all breeds) and compete. Details are found at www.mustangshowcase.com. More information on the Mustang can be found at www.WildHeartRestartRanch.org



Mustang Dory and Hilary Hansen celebrate at the Mustang Challenge in Las Vegas.

LEFT: Wild Heart board member Sonya Hollander joins the Mustangs at the Wild Heart Ranch. Sister Sage is a nine-year-old grey mare from the Devils Garden Herd Management Area. In the background is Dakota Sue, an 11-year-old bay mare from the Bitner Herd Management Area. She was Hilary's first Mustang. PHOTO BY EVAN JACOBS



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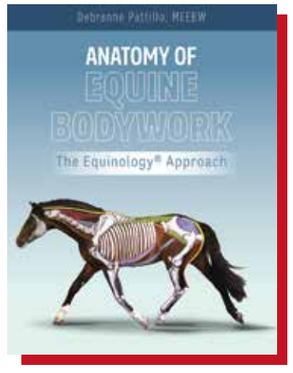
PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE WILD

Whispers in The Wild is the first in a series of major art compilations by Sonoma County photographer Jim Codington. Known for 40 years as a large animal veterinarian in Marin County and a graduate of the University of California, Davis, Jim devoted his life to healing animals. When he wound down his practice, he expanded his travels to capture and share the special connections he felt whenever he met animals in the wild. In keeping with his lifelong commitment to protecting animals, Jim will donate profits to leading animal conservation efforts here and around the world. This work is available from both Amazon.com and local bookstores.



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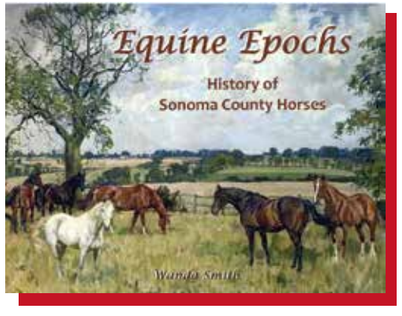


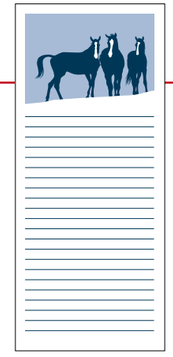
EQUINE EPOCHS

From pre-history to the last century, this book features a timeline of historic horse events, photos, a description of how horses returned to Sonoma County, and how their uses changed in the last few centuries. It finishes with descriptions of modern demographics and current horse services. Available from the author, Wanda Smith, at wanda@equisports.net or the Oakmont Farmers Market on Saturdays.









EQUESTRIAN ARTIST

Artist and avid equestrian Kari Ontko from Sonoma combines her love of horses and dogs with a modern drawing style and strong use of color. She has designed a collection of holiday cards (available in boxes or single cards), birthday cards, cocktails napkins, notepads and calendars. Shop her work on: Etsy.com/shop/OntkoDesign



"Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet" is the first line of an 1892 poem by Rudyard Kipling. If we substituted the word "east" with English and "west" with western, we might ask ourselves if Kipling's statement applies to these two seemingly different ways to enjoy horses. Or are horses simply horses? Or are colt starters simply colt starters?



EAST MEETS WEST

For this issue, we chat about horse starting, seeking perspectives from one from the western universe and one from the English world.

GINA RUTH (GR): is a hunter/jumper trainer specializing in starting and developing young horses and working with horses experiencing behavioral challenges. Gina's style draws on diverse equestrian traditions and emphasizes shared communication between horses and riders. Gina teaches and trains at Hawkwood Hill Farm in Petaluma. www.openwaterfarms.org

KALLI DURANCZYK (KD): is a western performance horse trainer and colt starter. She began her journey working for cutting horse trainers and running cattle. Her style is deeply rooted in tradition, and she can start and finish horses in all scenarios from different backgrounds. Her current path includes blacksmithing. In addition, she creates charcoal horse portraits. Kalli currently trains privately in Sonoma County.

HJ: What Is Your Process?

GR: My process is never the same for any two horses. Like us, horses are individuals, and each wants to be seen and heard. To know a horse individually, I play games that ask questions about what this horse cares about. Does it care about buddies or a lot about food? Does it love a good belly scratch? Is it looking for a human connection, or is it even aware that it is possible?

This way, I use the horse's care to teach it. For example, if it is really interested in its buddies, I can send it forward to them, and pretty soon, it will find me as interesting as its buddies.

Ultimately, I ask questions before I mount any horse for the first time.

1. Does the horse lead, stand, and tie? If I can't motivate the horse's feet by using the halter and without moving my feet, I have work to do before climbing on its back. All horses should lead, direct, drive, find a stop, and understand giving to pressure while tied.
2. Ultimately, a good horse seeks its rider's intentions. This can only be attained by teaching the horse to operate on a soft feel. If I raise my energy, does the horse get moving? Can the horse find a stop or a downward transition if I bring my energy down?
3. Is it goosey? As much as we would like to act perfectly every time, we will never. My job is to prepare a horse for a realistic future. When people drop things that make noise, tie a bad knot, move carelessly, throw the saddle on awkwardly, or trip and kick sand, what is the horse's reaction? The goal is not for the horse to stand like a statue but to have a mental process that allows the horse to think through new situations.
4. Can I use the halter or snaffle bit to get the horse to make a big step with the outside hind leg?
5. Can I get to the front feet? I want to feel I can move a front foot to the left or right using the halter or snaffle bit.

I generally ride a horse in a western saddle and a rope halter, throwing the rope over the neck to change directions first. However, I have no hard and fast rules. Some horses will be more successful in an English saddle first or with a bit in their mouth. Ultimately, the question is, "What will make this horse feel confident in being ridden?"

KD: My process depends on how the owner will use the horse and what is important to that horse. Some things that I feel are important, a customer might feel are unnecessary. For example, I feel it is essential for a horse to stand still with confidence. If a horse's legs get caught in fencing, I want it to stand willingly, perfectly still so it does not injure itself. This simple step can potentially save a horse's life. For this reason, I feel hobbling is crucial for all horses to learn. I am starting a mare for a family that will go trail riding. The horse is taught to hobble and to hard tie. In an emergency, the horse needs to safely tie to a tree or hobble where it is. When horses get loose in the woods, large search parties must recover them. I feel these scary scenarios can be prevented with the proper foundation and tools.

Furthermore, softness in the face is important. Some are born soft; they take to everything easily and willingly without a fight. With those who are not naturally as soft, I spend time on the ground in the halter, teaching them to give to pressure and be more mentally fluid. As I build my exercises, they tend to take to everything more easily and willingly. My goal with every colt is to make the rest of its life easy street. Every scenario from the vet, farrier, and trainer should be a positive experience. They should be able to take on every new challenge with ease so they will always be in good company.

After the ground handling goes well and the horse is mentally soft, willing, and comfortable, I start many colts ponying with other horses. It is easier for a young horse to grasp the concept of giving to pressure by using another horse. They learn a new respect for you when acting as a follower. The path of least resistance is always the better one in my book.

Most people make a big deal about the first saddling and first ride. Honestly, it usually is not a big deal to my colts after learning to hobble, work from the ground, pony, and drive. The horse's work ethic comes out on the fourth ride when they realize there is a routine. Occasionally, there is a hiccup, but usually, the horse is a willing, forward, and good citizen.

With colt starting we are setting horses up for the rest of their lives. With a good foundation, I am steering a horse on a safer path, ensuring it will forever land in loving homes.

HJ: Does The Horse's Future Matter?

GR: Concern about the future is a human-brained idea. Horses are present in the moment. I try hard to think what the horse cares about. Thus, I try not to consider the future or past when I'm in the round pen with a horse.

That said, as I'm getting to know a horse, I will formulate a plan. I might spend more time overall getting to the horse's mind and feet. For sport horses, we want to make sure we don't shut down the horse's hind end. We want big steps behind. Some western guys prioritize the stop, and then it is harder to get the horse free in the hind end down the line. However, ultimately, the job is to get the horse to be an adept thinker and for the human to get to a horse's feet. People who tell you there is only one right way to do things have not worked with many horses. The future is a factor in the horse's training, but it's more about who the horse is in the present and whether it is excited to do the present job.

KD: I've seen programs where every horse is sent through the same process. I don't do that. Each horse is an individual. What are you being trained for? Will the horse physically hold up to certain types of work? I've had a couple of colts that were supposed to be cutters, and honestly, they were not going to hold up to those hard stops. I've changed my approach thousands of times to tailor my program to the horse's needs. What each individual can handle mentally and physically is different. Yet, with each horse, I try to ride with these simple principles: ride from the seat and make that horse your friend.

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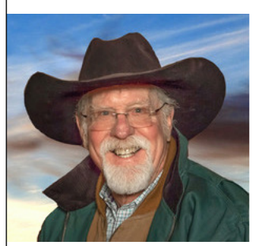
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HJ: Does Only A Certain Personality Specialize In Starting Horses?

GR: Anyone can do this job, really. If you focus on perfectionism and ego, you will not be a good teacher to the horse. Horses learn best from themselves; sometimes, you must let them make the mistake. On the other hand, when we protect them from making mistakes, we deprive their willingness to learn.

Similarly, the trainer has to make mistakes, let the horse make mistakes, try different tactics, and learn from our failures. This is often a dusty, sweaty, uncomfortable process.

In the hunter/jumper industry, we need more young trainers who are learning from various disciplines and horse personalities. Young horses are incredibly fulfilling for anyone willing to rejoice in the small successes and go at the pace of the individual horse.

KD: I'm always thinking about the animal's comfort every step of the way. To do this work, someone must absolutely love the horse.

HJ: What Attracted You To The Specialty?

GR: I love watching a horse understand something and take the initiative because it uses what you have just taught it, not because it is submissive. It is proud of its accomplishment and wants to show you. Here, the partnership starts.

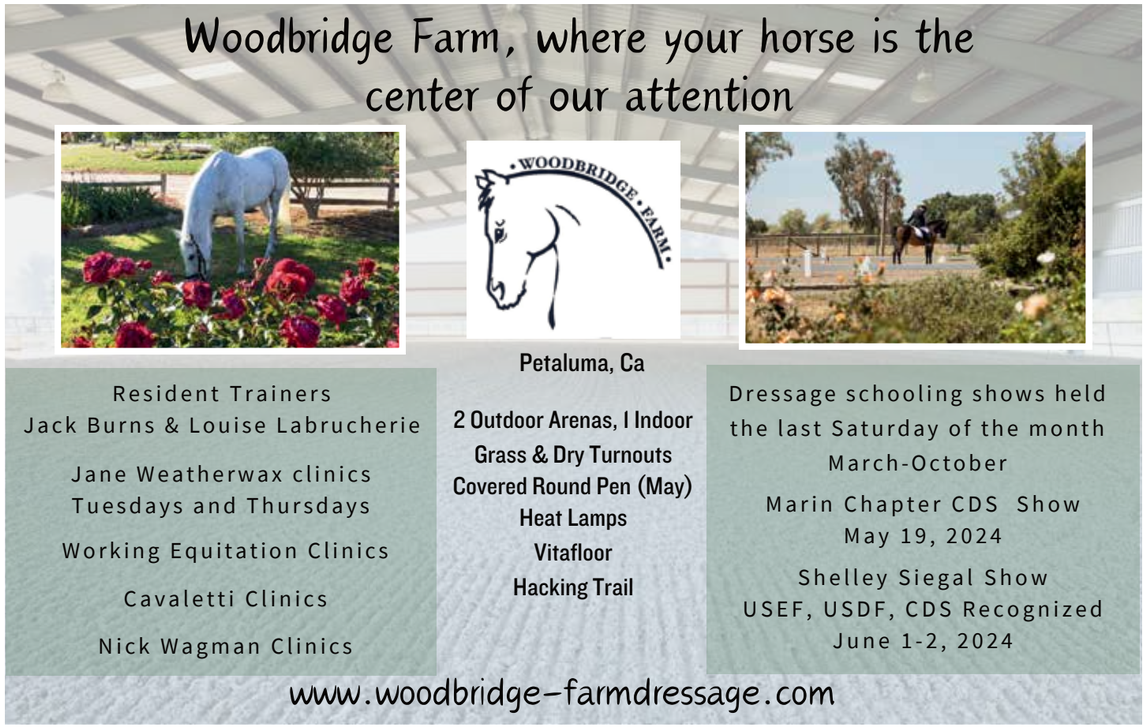
A horse responding to a job by being aloof and most interested in protecting itself physically and emotionally doesn't take risks for you, try new things for you, or bail you out of a bad situation. In our world, the greatest gift a human can give a horse is teaching it to think and try enough to understand even from the most unthinking horsemen.

When I was younger, I worked with people who were homeless due to domestic violence. I realized that humans and animals protect themselves from trauma. Today, my calling is to develop horses in a way that honors their mind and body.

I find young horses and problem horses incredibly fulfilling because they require me to be mentally agile and constantly work to improve my timing and feel.

KD: I got my first ranch job as a teenager. The boss threw me into starting a few colts, and he taught me a few things. He used a stick with a plastic bag on the end of it. He never hit the horse with a whip. He said you had to make that horse your friend and always focus on forward motion. I learned how to really ride with my body and seat.

I was over the moon when I had my first ride on a colt's first ride. I still feel that way; something is absolutely magical about stealing the first ride on that horse. You carry that with you for the rest of your life. It's an honor.



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SONOMA COUNTY HORSE COUNCIL
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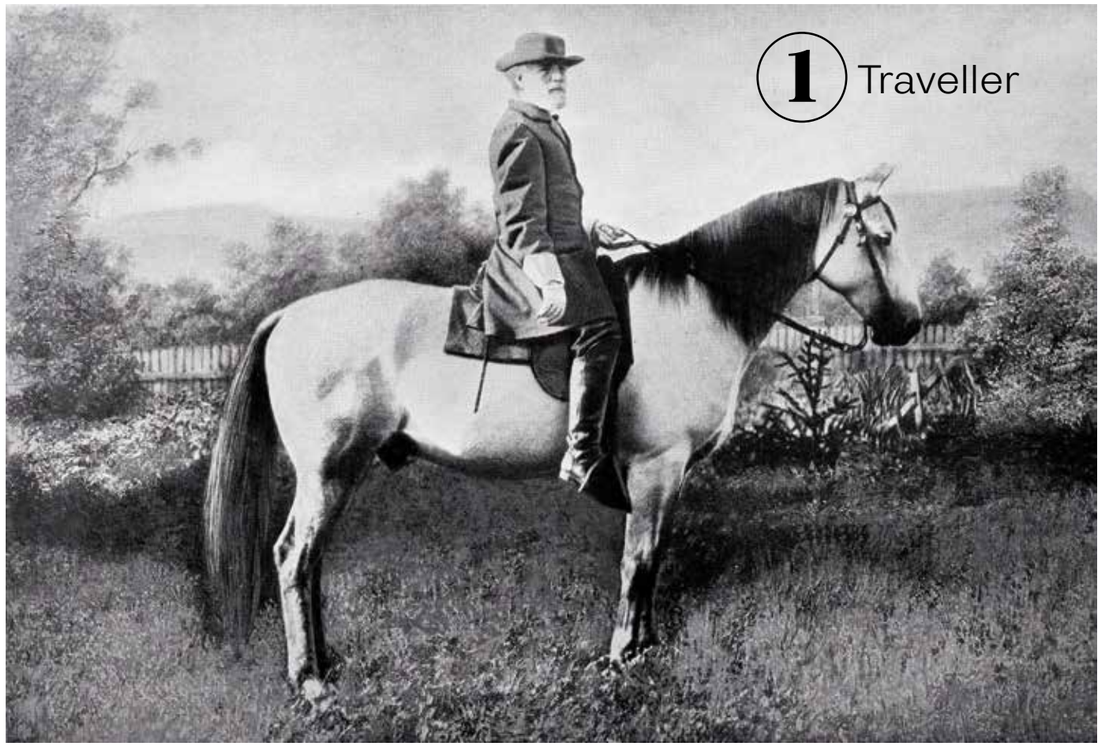
10 FAMOUS AMERICAN HORSES

BY HEATHER COX RICHARDSON



General Robert E. Lee rode Traveller (spelled with two Ls, in the British style) from February 1862 until the general's death in 1870. Traveller was a grey American Saddlebred of 16 hands. He had great endurance for long marches and was generally unflappable in battle, although he once broke both of General Lee's hands when he shied at enemy movements. Lee brought Traveller with him when he assumed the presidency of Washington and Lee University. Traveller died of tetanus in 1871. He is buried on campus, where the Safe Ride program still uses his name. The book *Traveller* by Richard Adams tells about the Civil War from Traveller's point of view.



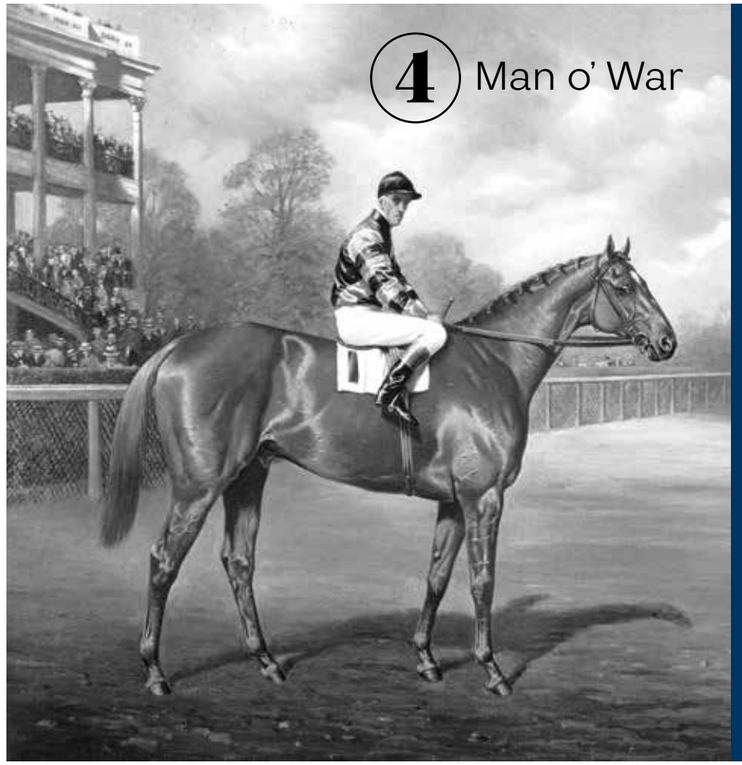
Comanche

Comanche was attached to General George Amstrong Custer's detachment of the 7th Cavalry when it engaged the Lakota in 1876 at the Battle of Little Bighorn. The troops in the detachment were all killed in the engagement, but soldiers found the 15-hand bay Comanche badly wounded two days later down in a ravine. They nursed him back to health, and he became the 7th Cavalry's mascot. The commanding officer decreed that the horse would never again be ridden and that he would always be paraded, draped in black, in all military ceremonies involving the 7th Cavalry. When Comanche died of colic in 1891, he was given a full military funeral. Comanche's taxidermied body is preserved in the Natural History Museum at the University of Kansas. The book *Comanche: Story of America's Most Heroic Horse,* by David Aspel, was published in 1951 and is available in hardcover.



3 Beautiful Jim Key

Beautiful Jim Key was a performing horse trained by formerly enslaved veterinarian Dr. William Key. Key demonstrated how Beautiful Jim could read, write, do math, tell time, spell, sort mail, and recite the Bible. Beautiful Jim performed from 1897 to 1906 and became a legend. An estimated ten million Americans saw him perform, and others collected his memorabilia—buttons, photos, and postcards—or danced the Beautiful Jim Key two-step. Dr. Key insisted that he had taught Beautiful Jim using only kindness, and Beautiful Jim Key's popularity was important in preventing cruelty to animals in America, with more than two million children signing the Jim Key Band of Mercy, in which they pledged, "I promise always to be kind to animals." The tale is found in the book *Beautiful Jim Key: The Lost History of the World's Smartest Horse* by Mim Eichler Rivas.



4 Man o' War

Named for his owner, August Belmont, Jr., who was overseas in World War I, Man o' War is widely regarded as the top Thoroughbred racehorse of all time. He won 20 of his 21 races and almost a quarter of a million dollars in the early twentieth century. His one loss came after a bad start. Man o' War sired many of America's famous racehorses, including Hard Tack, which in turn sired Seabiscuit, the small horse that came to symbolize hope during the Great Depression. Among the books about the horse are *Big Red* by C. W. Anderson in 1943, *Man o' War*, fictional story by Walter Farley in 1962, and *Man o' War: A Legend Like Lightning* by Dorothy Ours in 2006.

5 Trigger

Entertainer Roy Rogers chose the palomino Trigger from five rented horses as his mount in a western film in the 1930s, changing his name from Golden Cloud to Trigger because of his quick mind and feet. Rogers rode Trigger in his 1950s television series, making the horse a household name. When Trigger died, Rogers had his skin draped over a Styrofoam mold and displayed it in the Roy Rogers and Dale Evans Museum in California. He also had a 24-foot statue of Trigger made from steel and fiberglass. One other copy of that mold was also made: it is "Bucky the Bronco," which rears above the Denver Broncos stadium south scoreboard. *An Illustrated History of Trigger, The Lives and Legend of Roy Rogers' Palomino* was written by Leo Pando in 2007.



6 Sergeant Reckless

American Marines in Korea bought a mare in October, 1952 from a Korean stable boy who needed the money to buy an artificial leg for his sister, who had stepped on a land mine. The Marines named her Reckless after their unit's nickname, the Reckless Rifles. They made a pet of her and trained her to carry supplies and to evacuate wounded. She learned to travel supply routes without a guide: on one notable day, she made 51 solo trips. Wounded twice, she was given a battlefield rank of corporal in 1953 and promoted to sergeant after the war, when she was also awarded two Purple Hearts and a Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal. *Sgt. Reckless: America's War Horse* by Robin Hutton was a best-selling book.





7 Mr. Ed

Mr. Ed was a talking palomino in a 1960s television show by the same name. At a time when westerns dominated American television, Mr. Ed was the anti-western, with the main human character a klutzy architect and the hero a horse that was fond of his meals and his comfortable life and spoke with the voice of Allan "Rocky" Lane, who made dozens of "B" westerns. But the show was a five-year hit as it married the past to the future. Mr. Ed offered a gentle, homely wisdom that enabled him to straighten out the troubles of the humans around him. The startling special effects that made it appear that the horse was talking melded modern technology with the comforting traditional community depicted in the show. Check Youtube.com to find the old and still funny *Mr. Ed* series.

8 Black Jack

The Morgan-American Quarter Horse Black Jack, named for John J. "Black Jack" Pershing, was the riderless black horse in the funerals of John F. Kennedy, Herbert Hoover, Lyndon Johnson, and Douglas MacArthur, as well as more than a thousand other funerals with full military honors. A riderless horse, with boots reversed in the stirrups, symbolized a fallen leader, while Black Jack's brands—a U.S. brand and an Army serial number—recalled the Army's history. Black Jack was purchased by Jacqueline Kennedy, widow to John F Kennedy, upon his retirement. Coal dark Black Jack himself was buried with full military honors; the only other horse honored with a military funeral was Comanche. Back Jack's full story is in an article in *Chronicle of the Horse* (www.chronofhorse.com/article/remembering-black-jack).



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Khartoum was the fictional Triple Crown racing winner and stud horse owned by Jack Woltz, the fictional Hollywood mogul in Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*. In one of the film version's most famous scenes, after Woltz refuses requests from Don Vito Corleone to cast singer Johnny Fontane in a movie, Woltz wakes up to find Khartoum's head in bed with him… and agrees to use Fontane in the film. In the novel, Fontane wins the Academy Award for his performance. According to an old Hollywood rumor, the story referred to real events. The rumor was that mobsters persuaded Columbia Pictures executive Harry Cohn to cast Frank Sinatra in *From Here to Eternity*. As Maggio, Sinatra revived his sagging film career and won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actor.

10 Secretariat

Secretariat was an American Thoroughbred that in 1973 became the first U.S. Triple Crown winner in 25 years. His records in the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness Stakes and the Belmont Stakes still stand. After Secretariat was stricken with a painful infection and euthanized in 1989, an autopsy revealed that he had an unusually big heart. Sportswriter Red Smith once asked his trainer how Secretariat had run one morning; Charlie Hatton replied, "The trees swayed." Try *The Horse that God Built: The Untold Story of Secretariat, the World's Greatest Racehorse* by Lawrence Scanlan.



After a few weeks of breaking news, I posted in my Letters from An American *newsletter a piece my friend Michael S. Green and I wrote on famous American horses. It was totally fun to research, too. I watched hours of Mr. Ed and read television history to try to figure out what made it such a popular show. This remains one of my favorite things I ever had a hand in writing.* heathercoxrichardson.substack.com

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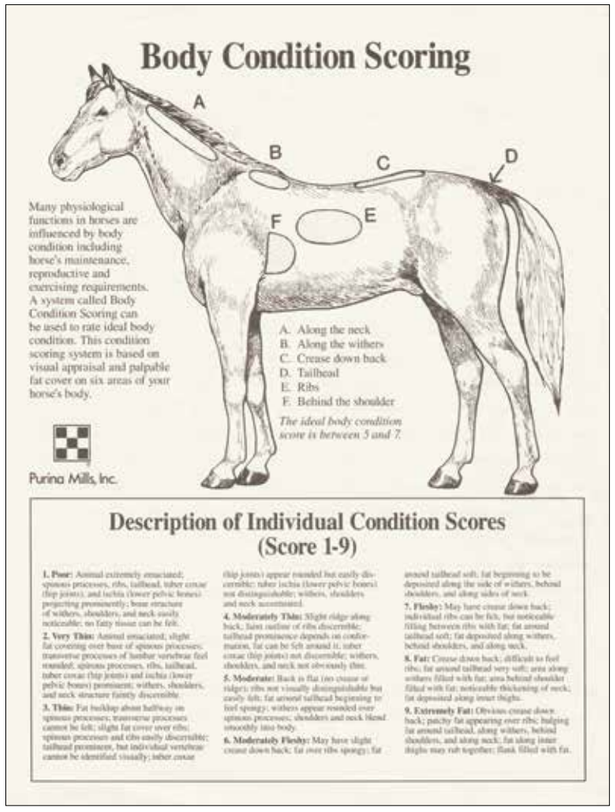
MY HORSE IS TOO SKINNY
WHAT SHOULD I DO?

BY MICHELLE BEKO DVM

It's not unusual for horses to drop weight now and then, especially in the winter when colder weather requires burning more calories to maintain body temperature. Also, horses can lose weight when their competition schedule gets busy.

Several causes may lead a horse to become too thin. The most common reason is that the horse does not get enough feed. Perhaps it is not fed enough, or it lives with other horses and does not get its fair share of feed. Even if the thin horse is dominant, it may be just a slow eater and will walk away from the food, allowing others to eat it.



Several years ago, I had two older mare patients who lived together. One had a normal to slightly high body condition score and the other was always a little thin. I tried to persuade the owner to separate them for at least one meal a day but she insisted that the thin mare was dominant and got all the food she wanted. Then the mare who wasn't thin colicked and died and the thin mare quickly put on weight, much to her owner's surprise.

Significant dental problems also can cause weight loss, especially in older horses who can wear through the enamel on the occlusal (chewing) surface of their teeth and have difficulty eating hay. They can have loose or missing teeth, which complicates chewing. In my opinion, it is uncommon for sharp points alone to cause weight loss.

Lastly, systemic disease can cause a horse to become underweight. The most common cause is probably gastric (stomach) ulcers. Chronic infections such as internal abscesses from pigeon fever or strangles, severe parasitism, and, least commonly, cancer, chronic liver or kidney problems also can cause a horse to become underweight.

Further, some horses, especially Thoroughbreds, seem to have a low body condition score, and that is their "normal."

So, what should you do if your horse is thinner than you'd like? If it isn't eating well, call your veterinarian, who can examine the horse and likely take blood work to rule out some systemic problems.

If the horse is eating well, try increasing hay until a little bit is left after each meal. If it only eats grass hay, add alfalfa to the diet. If that doesn't resolve the issue, add supplements like grain, rice bran, beet pulp, and/or oil to the diet. Flax seed oil or vegetable oil added to grain can significantly increase the calories the horse ingests. For a 22 year and older, try adding some senior feed. Senior feeds are pelleted and easy to consume, even with bad teeth. If the thin horse is eating with others, try to separate them for at least one meal a day.

If your horse routinely drops weight in the winter, anticipate it and start increasing their feed in the fall. You can also start blanketing at night in the cold months. If none of these steps work, enlist the help of your veterinarian.

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