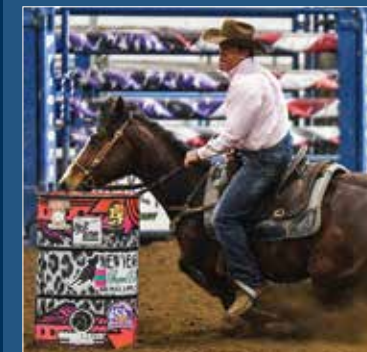


SONOMA COUNTY

# HORSE JOURNAL

PUBLISHED BY THE SONOMA COUNTY HORSE COUNCIL







Jennifer Knef approaches luxury real estate marketing from an investor's perspective even if her clients are buying or selling their primary residence. She helps homeowners sell at the highest possible price in the least amount of time and also helps buyers uncover hidden opportunities for upside potential. With a professional career that spans over 30+ years in Real Estate, Banking and Finance, Jennifer's focus is representing the most distinctive wine country, rural and equestrian estates of Sonoma, Napa and Marin Counties.



707.537.2370 d  
707.483.7345 c  
JKnef@cbtnorcal.com  
JenniferKnef.com  
DRE#01503867



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**THE HORSE JOURNAL  
EDITORIAL COMMITTEE**

**MANAGING EDITOR**

Patti Schofler  
schc.pschofler@gmail.com

**DESIGN**

Kari Ontko  
kari.ontko@comcast.net

**COPY EDITOR**

Eileen O'Farrell

**PHOTOGRAPHY**

Bill Stacy  
www.bluecinnabar.com/Bills-Photos

Marcie Lewis  
marcielewisphotography@gmail.com

**PRINTING**

AD-Vantage Marketing, Inc.  
ad-vantagemarketing.com

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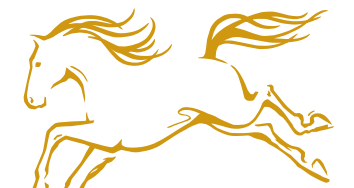
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info@sonomacountyhorsecouncil.org



**BY MAIL**

Sonoma County Horse Council  
PO Box 7157  
Santa Rosa, CA 95407



SONOMA COUNTY

**HORSE JOURNAL**

Published By The Sonoma County Horse Council  
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Top Row (left to right): Tom Parsons,  
photo courtesy of Tom Parsons; Charlotte,  
the Wonder Pony, photo by Marcie Lewis  
Photography; James Kerr, DVM, photo  
courtesy of Marian Nelson  
Bottom Row (left to right): Margaret Manion,  
photo courtesy of Margaret Manion; David  
Lawson, photo by Full Gallop Photography

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## CONTRIBUTORS



**SUSIE WEAVER BANTA** is a transplant from the East Coast, making Petaluma her home five years ago. She is a life-long amateur hunter/jumper rider with a career in human resources, including 17 years at Pricewaterhouse-Coopers. For many years she was

fortunate to be a pioneer of working remotely, allowing her to compete in Florida and the northeast. Now retired, she rides, writes, and is a volunteer mediator with Recourse Mediation Services at the Sonoma Superior Court.



**PATTI SCHOFLE**r is the managing editor of the *Horse Journal*, a publicist and freelance writer for national equestrian sports magazines. She began her writing career as a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* and is author of the Lyons Press book on Arabian

horses *Flight Without Wings*. Passionate about journalism and dressage, art and travel, she is a graduate of the USDF L Judges Education Program and trains her eleven-year-old PRE Toledano.

**DO YOU WANT TO WRITE FOR THE HORSE JOURNAL? OR SEE YOUR PHOTOS IN PRINT?**

Contact Patti Schofler at [schc.pschofler.com](mailto:schc.pschofler.com)



**DANELLE K. JACOBS, ESQ.** is a realtor and attorney. She has lived in West County with her family and herd of quirky rescues for over twenty-five years. She is a lifelong hunter-jumper rider and horse owner with an equine science and English degree from

Colorado State University. Besides spending time with her family and herd, Danelle enjoys reading, traveling, meeting new people, and helping them with their real estate needs. She can be reached at [danelle.jacobs@cbrealty.com](mailto:danelle.jacobs@cbrealty.com), [www.storistables.com](http://www.storistables.com) or 707-583-1422.



**LISA THOMAS** is an amateur rider and horse owner of some 35 years. She's competed in western and English riding disciplines and has been a lifelong trail rider. Lisa was awarded her USDF bronze medal this year and is working toward a silver medal with her Andalusian gelding, Benedero.



**MICHELLE BEKO, DVM** has been an equine veterinarian since 1991. She enjoys spending time with her husband and daughter as well as doing dressage and jumping with her horse Ranger. You can reach her at Empire Equine at 707-545-3909, [empire-equine.com](http://empire-equine.com)

## President's Message



JOHN O'HARA PHOTOGRAPHY

SPRING HAS SPRUNG!  
After an active, rainy winter, we see plenty of growth that makes those with permanent pastures very happy. Anyone growing hay also has loads for which to be thankful. With two years of significant rainfall under our belts, we quickly forget all the drought discussions of the past few years. Let this be a bellwether for

seasons to come. With the sun heading into the higher part of the sky, it's time to be out on your horses, enjoying all of the goodness California offers.

The Horse Council is equally excited about our upcoming Equus Awards Gala on Saturday, May 11, at the Friedman Center in Santa Rosa. This biennial celebration recognizes those who have devoted countless hours of service to the horse community. These are people who have shown leadership through their actions and contributed time and energy for the benefit of the equine world in the North Bay. Our event is the chance to acknowledge their efforts and share conviviality in their honor.

Each time we organize this event, quiet undercurrents of thought arise as to whether we will receive enough recommendations to fill the slate. And, true to form, this year offered a basketful of wonderful nominations that completely overloaded the in-basket.

Our selection committee had a challenging job given that we received 19 suggestions for the award. It is gratifying to see the number of names put forth and the enthusiasm with which friends and colleagues offered them. There really is no shortage of fabulous people doing great things for our community, making it a pleasure to celebrate their efforts.

The Equus Awards Gala also serves as the SCHC's premier fundraiser, the primary source of the money that powers the Horse Council's annual efforts, of course along with an enormous amount of volunteer labor.

The Equus event will provide ample opportunity to help the cause by direct donation as well as through silent and live auctions with items designed to strike people's fancies.

Because the ticket price just breaks even with the cost to produce the event, the extra money that people are willing to contribute allows the Council to do the job you have come to expect and value. Your participation will be greatly appreciated. Please attend and help out by raising your paddle.

If you are unable to attend, please consider making a donation, either with a check sent to Sonoma County Horse Council, P.O. Box 7157, Santa Rosa, California 95407, or through the website [SonomaCountyHorseCouncil.org](http://SonomaCountyHorseCouncil.org) with a credit card. Everything is appreciated.

Thank you for your support, and I hope to see you for a fun time at the Equus Awards.  
*Happy trails, Henry Beaumont*



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- Melissa Kalember

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[m\\_murphy@sonic.net](mailto:m_murphy@sonic.net)

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*The 14th*  
*Sonoma County Horse Council*  
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*Awards and Fundraiser*  
**May 11, 2024**  
5:00 p.m.

Honoring Outstanding Members of Sonoma County's Equestrian Community

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Buy tickets at [sonomacountyhorsecouncil.org](http://sonomacountyhorsecouncil.org)





Tickets for the 57th **Russian River Rodeo** on June 22 and 23 in Duncans Mill go on sale May 1 online or can be purchased at the rodeo. The gate opens at 11; the rodeo starts at 1 p.m. [www.russianriverrodeo.com](http://www.russianriverrodeo.com)

Jamie Palmer of Smartsville, Ca. barrel races at the Russian River Rodeo. Photo by Lisa Gray

**FEED STORE MARKS 50TH YEAR**

Larsen's Feed Store in Cotati is celebrating its 50th year in business with a sale May 17-19. Bob Larsen was raised in Sonoma until 1947, when the family moved the dairy to the current site of the feed store at 4700 Gravenstein Hwy, Cotati. In 1968, Bob's father sold the property and dairy business to Bob and his wife Alice. He served as president of the Dairymen's Association of California, and his dairy was one of the top producers in the state. In late 1973, the cows were sold to two local dairymen. Since the barns had just been stocked with hay for the winter, in January 1974, Bob and Alice started selling hay. Soon customers were asking for other items, leading them to run a fully stocked feed store.

Bob and Alice Larsen, Sonoma County Equus Award winners, are deceased, Bob in 2020 and Alice in 2023. Their son Ken and daughter-in-law Amy Lewis now operate the store.

**NONI SMITH AT CHALK HILL**

**Noni Smith Horse Training** has relocated to the 300-acre Chalk Hill Ranch in Healdsburg. Noni is backed by 30 years of experience training horses and ponies of all ages in hunters/jumpers, eventing, dressage, trails and western, and cross-training for mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

The ranch offers private trails, an indoor arena, an outdoor arena, jumps, an obstacle course, a round pen, pastures with shelters, stall paddocks, paddocks with shelters, and large turnouts. The various training options are full training, half training, and per time, haul-in lessons and training are also available. 707-721-4100 nonids1@gmail.com

**CORRECTION**

In the Winter 2024 issue, the *Horse Journal* inadvertently referred to the cover photographer as Tina Finch. Her correct name is Tina Fitch. Sorry, Tina.

**MONEY FOR HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS**

US Equestrian (USEF) offers five \$1,000 scholarships for high school seniors preparing to enter a college or university. Scholarship funds are provided to students interested in furthering his or her equestrian knowledge and skills throughout college. Applicants must continue to be involved in equestrian-related experiences while in college. Students must be active competing or subscribing members of USEF and preparing to enter a college or university in the fall of the current competition year. Applications are available at [www.usef.org](http://www.usef.org). A completed application is due to the USEF office on or before the July 31 deadline. Direct any questions to Emily McSweeney at [emcsweeney@usef.org](mailto:emcsweeney@usef.org)

**RENOWNED DRESSAGE TRAINERS AT SANBAR**

The 2024 dressage clinic series continues at Sanbar Dressage, 6529 Lakeville Highway, Petaluma.

**May 6-7: Anne Gribbons** is an FEI 5\* judge and USEF S and R sport horse breeding judge. She has officiated at numerous international dressage CDIs (Concours de Dressage International) was the head of the ground jury at the World Equestrian Games in 2018, and officiated at the World Dressage Championships in 2022. Gibbons has trained and competed 18 of her horses from the start to Grand Prix and has brought several others to FEI levels for her students.

**June 6-7:** As development and chef d'equipe for the 2024 Olympics, **Christine Traurig** has become one of the most celebrated trainers and clinicians in the U.S. In addition to her passion for developing young horses, Traurig has coached several international riders, including Sabine Shut-Kery, Jan Ebeling, Kathleen Raine, and David Wightman.

**EAST BAY TRAINER MOVES TO PENNGROVE**

**Meredith Crawford Dressage** has opened for business at Rancho Union, 2455 E. Railroad Ave., Penngrove. Meredith pairs dressage training and horse management to create a holistic environment for horses to thrive. She blends scientific insights with tradition, sports therapy, and complementary training methods (poles, cavaletti, in-hand work, etc.).



Meredith Crawford takes a gallop on her Friesian.

Photo courtesy of Meredith Crawford

The facility offers 12' x 12' stalls with daily grass or dry turnouts, a full-size dressage-covered arena with footing from GGT, a large outdoor arena, and access to trails. In addition to 24/7 access to forage, blanketing, and fly protection services, Meredith also arranges custom nutrition programs in partnership with Dr. Mark DePaolo of Horse Hair Analysis.

**NATIONAL EQUINE ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY RELEASED**

The American Horse Council (AHC) has released the 2023 Equine Economic Impact Survey, shedding light on the contributions of the equine industry to the U.S. economy. It offers a comprehensive overview of the economic impact and trends within the equine sector. Key highlights of the survey include the following:

**1. Diverse Economic Sectors Impacted:** \$177 billion. That's the total value added in 2023 from the equine industry, up from \$122 billion in 2017. The equine industry's ripple effect extends beyond the traditional sectors. From agriculture and tourism to veterinary services and technology, the survey showcases the interconnectedness of the equine world with other economic realms.

**2. Employment Boost:** The survey reveals a substantial impact on employment, with 2.2 million jobs linked both directly and indirectly to the equine sector. Not only are breeders, trainers, veterinarians, and farriers represented, but so are truck drivers, nutritionists, chemists, police officers, and journalists.

**3. Slight Downshift in Population:** While there is a slight downshift in the total population of horses from 2023 (6.6 million) compared to 2017 (7.2 million), that's only a slight consideration when compared to the growing numbers in jobs and expenditures.

The purpose of the survey is to demonstrate the value of the equine industry in the national and state economies by analyzing the direct, indirect, and induced economic impacts of horse ownership, recreation, and equine-related services.

The 2023 Equine Economic Impact Study can be purchased as a digital download from the AHC website: <https://horsecouncil.org/economic-impact-study/>



# EQUUS AWARD HONOREES

Outstanding Members of the Sonoma County's Equestrian and Equine Community  
Charlotte, the Wonder Pony, James Kerr, DVM, David Lawson, Margaret Manion, Tom Parsons

ON MAY 11, Sonoma County Horse Council's prestigious EQUUS AWARDS GALA AND FUNDRAISER will celebrate these outstanding contributors to the equine community. This biennial fundraiser supports the Horse Council's vital initiatives, including safety programs, youth events, equine disaster relief, and community outreach.

## CHARLOTTE THE WONDER PONY

BY SUSIE BANTA

Every once in a while, you come across someone whom you know instantly is special. Meet Charlotte the Wonder Pony. When you walk toward her, she pricks her ears without an ounce of tension, looks straight at you, and seems to be saying, "Hi. How are you? Nice to meet you."

Charlotte is a 26-year-old — give or take a year or two — Welsh pony. Plain chestnut with a long mane, and an interesting white design on her left hind leg, a bushy forelock hides a white half-moon on her forehead. Not hidden is an expression of kindness, intelligence, and curiosity that makes you smile even before you get close to her.

For the past eight years, Charlotte has been a mainstay member of Equi-Ed Therapeutic Riding Program in Santa Rosa. Founded in 1993 by Maxine Freitas, executive director and head instructor, Equi-Ed began as a program through the Special Education Department of Santa Rosa City Schools. Equi-Ed offers horsemanship instruction, competition opportunities, and specialized programs for individuals with disabilities as young as four.

Little is known about Charlotte's early years except that she was a gift to grandchildren when neither they nor she had any training. Because of her kind nature, she remained with the family but without a job. A few years passed before Pony Club teenagers found her, and her training began. They soon realized that they



had a pony of a lifetime. She was easy to train and took to her Pony Club tasks. At ease in the family trailer, she went to the beach, horse shows, Pony Club rallies, camps, fox hunting, and even parades. She was a natural jumper, willing to take any fence, even without a bridle. All the while, she maintained her gentle nature, kind to everyone, easy to handle.

When her teenagers outgrew her, they thought they had found her a comfortable lease, but she was once again without a job. Her teenagers visited her

often. One visit, after only a few months, as they were leaving, she let out a loud and wistful whinny. It was clear she was unhappy. The family ended the lease, and she returned home. What to do with a wonderful pony who wanted a job?

The teenagers' mom, Katie Moore, thought Equi-Ed might be a perfect job for Charlotte. Interviewing her for the job, Equi-Ed tried a series of screening tests, such as shaking pom-poms, waving flags, and even presenting a life-sized inflated dinosaur, to determine if she would be suitable for the rigors of therapeutic riding. Charlotte was a natural, passed the tests with flying colors, and joined the Equi-Ed team in 2016.

Therapeutic riding horses must be tolerant, unreactive to unexpected body moments or weight shifts from their riders, and tolerant of equally unexpected screams of delight. They must be patient and able to wait at the mounting ramp without moving while riders are transferred from wheelchairs to their backs. Curiosity, not dullness, makes horses like

Charlotte so good at this job. Their ability to overcome new riders' fear to transfer their calmness to nervous riders and new handlers sets Charlotte apart. She exudes a calm confidence that telegraphs "it's ok" to those working with her.

At Equi-Ed, some riders are accompanied by a handler and one or two walkers who help ensure each rider is safe. Some riders are in classes of two to four horses where they are steering and regulating the horses independently, mostly walking, sometimes trotting, occasionally cantering, based on rider skill level. Charlotte shines with or without the handlers, never taking advantage and always caring for her riders.

Equi-Ed normally operates eight-to-ten-week sessions with two weeks off. There are three to four classes per lesson day, three days per week. The experience often includes grooming and tacking up, and in good weather, skill development in the arena is followed by a trail ride out on the property. Giving riders of varying levels of experience and capabilities this full exposure of caring for and working with the horses depends upon horses like Charlotte.

Charlotte's size, about 13 hands, makes her suitable for riders from small adults to young children. Her temperament makes her suitable for all.

Is she ever naughty? "Well, no," replied Maxine, "but when left loose in the ring, she does like to walk up the wheelchair ramp, where she takes a look around, perhaps hangs for a while, and then backs down."

Why does she walk up that ramp? Without hesitation, her answer may probably be, "I just want to check out how things would look if I were 17-hands."



Photos courtesy of Maxine Freitas

## JAMES KERR, DVM

BY PATTI SCHOFER



Photos courtesy of Marian Nelson

"Every day I touch and smell a horse is a good day. If I'm lucky to throw a leg over a horse, even a better day."

James Kerr, DVM, known to most as Jamie, has proven his great feelings for horses by dedicating 42 years to equine veterinary practice, riding 5053 miles on the endurance trail, finishing 100 miles on the Western States Trail Ride (Tevis Cup), and earning the coveted belt buckle.

Jamie credits his mom for setting him on this path. Born in Pico Rivera, California, Jamie and school were not mixing well by the time he reached ninth grade. Before it went from bad to worse, his mom sent him to the Box S Ranch in Bend, Oregon, and to cattleman Stanley Martin, who taught him how to ride, move cattle through the high country, and shoot a rifle. And even though he was bucked off the horse on the first ride, "horses just sucked me in."

He learned how to stay in the saddle and spent three summers at the Oregon ranch before moving to his next life-altering journey, an 18-year-old in Vietnam, arriving with the Tet Offensive.

Returning to the U.S. in 1978, Jamie headed to Humboldt University in Arcata, California, to study forestry. Along the way, the voracious reader picked up the book *All Creatures Great and Small*, and as you might expect, his career goals changed. So smitten was he with his future career that when he went to work at an animal hospital where the head vet did not like the "long hairs," he chopped off the hair that had reached down his back.

Even more indicative of Jamie's persistence and focus, in 1982, it took the then 28-year-old three tries to gain acceptance into the University of California Davis





School of Veterinary Medicine. He knew then as he knows now, "No question that I did the right thing." During the first two years out of veterinary school, Jamie worked at Golden Gate Fields race-track, gaining vast experience,

some very difficult. "The vets I worked with were tough men. A horse broke a leg, then a second leg on the track. They sent me out to give the horse meds to kill him. Suddenly, I realized I was in front of a full grandstand, and I had killed my first horse," he sadly related.

For 20 years, Jamie had a solo practice in Napa, after which he opened his practice in Petaluma.

Endurance riding has been an extreme passion for Jamie for forty-plus years, so much so that when he wasn't riding down the trail for 50 miles or more, he served as a ride veterinarian, often the head vet at the Tevis Cup and other famous rides.

"Endurance people are like family to me," he said, recalling his first Tevis Cup ride. He discovered the morning of the ride that his own horse had injured a suspensory ligament. After putting out the word that he would ride anything, he ended up with a horse that had never gone 100 miles, much less on challenging terrain like the Tevis trail. The pair, however, finished in 25th place, a worthy accomplishment. The horse Heraldic would go on to win just about everything in endurance.

His passion for endurance, in part, stems from how hard it is. "It's the challenge of the trail, the weather, and the condition of the trail. Riders must recognize how fit they and their horses are and rate them accordingly." And clearly, it is a chance to be with horses.

Today he and wife Marian Nelson, a hunter-jumper trainer, enjoy the Petaluma ranch where they keep three retired Warmbloods and a donkey named Handsome. Jamie and Marian, as you might expect, met on the job.

"Jamie is passionate and caring with all the horses," Marian described. "He always greets them with respect and kindness, letting them breathe and smell him, saying hello. He's a true animal lover. I loved taking him to Africa where we met young horsemen who took in everything he shared with them. Jamie is a true man who wears his heart on his sleeve."

Likely, Jamie will be cutting back on vetting the 100-mile rides and may shorten his own endurance career. However, caring for the lives of horses will continue until who knows when.

"As a buddy of mine said, 'horses to the end.'"

## DAVID LAWSON

BY PATTI SCHOFLER



Photo by Barbara Walker

Wednesday late afternoon, the Sonoma County Fairgrounds feels like a ghost town with maybe a couple of people putting out a table or two. Then in come the trucks and trailers, and more trucks and trailers. Out come the barrels and the people who find their place. The place is bustling. The place is a community.

When barrel racer David Lawson arrived in Sonoma County in 2008, there was no Wednesday night barrel racing. He left behind him in the Midwest a thriving community and training business, armed with the belief that if you trust, it will all work out.

If his thriving business at Hunter Lane Equestrian and the close community surrounding him are any

indication, you would have to say it did. He supports local events by managing the Sonoma County Fair Horse Show, producing the Best Buck in the Bay gay rodeo each fall in Duncans Mills, and producing the winter Wednesday Night Open Arena and Barrel Races at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds.

Born in Illinois, David, his three siblings, and his parents moved to Fort Madison, Iowa, when David was in 7th grade. That was when, finally, his mom said he could have a horse, but only if he could afford it. "I worked a paper route, detasseled corn, and cleaned more stalls than anyone on the planet. In those days, if anyone would let me ride their horse, I would ride it."

After earning

an associate's degree at the local junior college, David thought he needed more, and earned an associate's degree in equine science and one in horse science, at Blackhawk College in Kewanee, Illinois, largely because he wanted a way to be on the intercollegiate horse judging team. It worked. David won the high-scoring individual at a Denver qualifying competition, and the Blackhawk team won AQHA World Champion Horse Judging.

The association with Blackhawk introduced David to a life-changing mentor, barrel and roping icon Martha Josey. After having ridden with her in a clinic near his home in Iowa, David earned an internship with Josey at her ranch in Karnack, Texas. What was originally scheduled to be an eight-week internship turned into two years.

"When I was living at the ranch, I might get a call at two in the morning from Martha saying, 'I have an idea. Come over to my office, and we'll talk about it.' She was a great teacher and business person. I was lucky to work on the book she published in the late '90s. As part of 'Team Josey,' I traveled to Equine Affaire, Equitana,



Photo by Full Gallop Photography

and other places. It was a great experience from the horse and the business side."

David had competed in western pleasure, horsemanship and 4H competitions, but it was and is the speed events, pole bending and barrel racing, that from the beginning caught his attention.

"For all the events, you need to think about your body control and how it works with the horse to get it to do what you want it to do, but in speed, it must be done in the very precise moment."

David credits many of his insights to a teacher and mentor at Blackhawk College, Donna Irvin, who could break down any discipline to basic horsemanship.

"When I'm teaching, I want

my students to be not just great barrel racers but great horse people. Basic care, bringing out the best of what every horse can do, knowing how it feels, not just doing what you're told. This comes from Donna," David described.


After his internship in Texas, David returned to school to earn a four-year degree in special education at Western Illinois University and taught high school special education for five and a half years. It was then, in 2008, that a personal relationship brought him to Sonoma County.

"I had a good training business in the Midwest when I left and had no intention of staying here. I was going to get a job and have my own horses. Here I was, an unknown from Iowa. Yet it turned out that I was lucky to become a part of a community here. It was meant to be."

Today, training, showing, and sales of barrel horses at various competition levels are the focus of David's business. He has "many" horses of his own, mostly offspring of his Quarter Horse stud Never Hit Seventeen, called Beckham, who tragically was kicked last July and had to be put down.



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## EQUUS AWARD HONOREES

Perhaps his instinct for what his students need and the importance that he gives to them is why his new life came to succeed. "I've never been good at teaching according to a timer. I hang with them until they get out of the quicksand and get to the good part. Everyone deserves that feeling of when it goes well."

His favorite part about training and teaching is seeing progress. "If I get to see someone who starts as a beginner and becomes really good at competition, I love that. Or a young horse that comes here to learn; I get fulfillment from seeing the horse do well. I admit I've had to learn how to enjoy watching a horse that I started go with somebody else and get all the glory. Now, it's just as cool to see somebody else on one of my horses."

When Madison Camozzi won the derby at the New Year's Casino Barrel Race on Goodwins Reflect, trained by David, she was quoted as saying, "There is one person that I know, without whose help, I wouldn't have the opportunities to have half the memories or experiences that I have today. Thank you, David Lawson, for the blood, sweat, and tears that we shared to help make me the rider I am today. Without you, I would not be half the competitor. Thank you for seeing something in me and knowing to never stop pushing me to be the best. Thank you for sharing with me your amazing horse, Maverick."

David's life is about trusting it will all work out. "I believe people come into your life at the right time, and I feel very fortunate to have had great people and horses that have trusted me."

### MARGARET MANION

BY PATTI SCHOFLEER

Margaret Manion found her way to an equine sports massage practice by a serendipitous route, but one that is fitting for someone who loves animals, has a mind that seeks answers, and finds great joy in others' success.

Today, Margaret lives on a small farm with two horses, a mule, a pig, and a cow. Her sports massage therapy practice brings comfort to horses and humans in the North Bay with as much engagement, enthusiasm, and appreciation as when she began 28 years ago.

No, she did not grow up on a ranch. Her home was suburban Portland, Oregon, and she was one of nine

siblings where no matter how much she pleaded with her parents, she couldn't have a horse. As a teenager, she indentured herself to a variety of trainers, took riding lessons, and eventually studied animal science at Oregon State University.

Marriage, four children, moves to Colorado and Davis, California, and various other changes in her life left Margaret looking for a job that would allow her to continue home-schooling her kids through a vibrant home-schooling parent-child cooperative of over 250 families. A member suggested Margaret look into massage therapy.

"I could never touch a human and be effective," she responded. But despite her doubts, Margaret went to massage school and started her own business.

"All of it was serendipitous. My instructor said I would be good at it and that I should get over my doubts. He based his

work on the sports massage work of Jack Meagher. Just a few weeks later, I was trying to sell my horse at a stable when a woman who knew I was a massage therapist offered me a book, *Beating Muscle Injuries for Horses*, by Jack Meagher. I thought, I'm never going to use this book."

Meagher was known for helping the U.S. Equestrian Teams at the Montreal Olympics in 1976 and at several World Championships and National Football League athletes.

"I wrote to the publisher asking if anyone in California could teach me this technique. I tried a little bit from the book on my horse and thought, this doesn't really work. Then, Jack himself wrote back to me about the Jack Meagher Institute in Massachusetts. The key to entering the program was having both horse and





human massage experience. I qualified! I went back to the school six times and eventually became a student teacher.”

Margaret had found the work she would love. “I’m not a touchy-feely person and don’t do the type of massage designed to relax the client. Mine is more of a structural massage, really the original sports massage.”

When Margaret started out with equine massage, not many people were familiar with the modality for horses. “That they trusted me with their horses was a big thing. I think my clients have given me the breadth of knowledge that I’ve had.”

“I love knowing how things are put together. I ask vets and trainers who are clients detailed questions. One was a pathologist. She invited me to watch a dissection she was working on. It gave me a mini-course on the interior anatomy of the horse.”

Feedback from clients adds to her treasure trove of knowledge. “It makes me a better therapist. Recently, I loosened up a horse for a woman. Right afterward, she rode and said everything felt 100 percent better except the poll. I went back to that area and found it was tight. Thanks to her, I could do a better job.”

“I want my clients to be successful at whatever endeavor they pursue. I love hearing when, for example, they come back from a competition and say, ‘We went off course, but it was the best ever. The horse could do things I’ve been asking.’ That motivates me.”

With her children grown, there are not as many animals around the farm. However, her love for them is no less. “I was one of these kids that pestered their parents so much about having animals. It started with a fish tank, then gerbils and parakeets.”

Margaret has participated in a variety of riding disciplines, but not many have seen her ride. “I’m a shy person. Most of my riding has been on the trail.”

About six years ago, she took a clinic with Mike Bridges to give a try at California-style Vaquero riding. “I like that it is a lot of independent learning. If you do the homework, you have a really fancy horse at the end. And he doesn’t care that I come in a dressage saddle and helmet.”

As grateful as Margaret is to her clients for “letting me work with their precious horses and dogs,” so too are her clients and their animals to her for engendering trust. One client described in detail how her horse dances the cha-cha when he sees Margaret coming to give him the works.



Photos courtesy of Margaret Manion

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**TOM PARSONS**

BY PATTI SCHOFLEER



Photos courtesy of Tom Parsons

The five generations of Tom Parsons' family that have lived in Sonoma County have all been related to the land in one way or another. His grandfather, Isaac Parsons, farmed the family property by Santa Rosa's Town and County Shopping Center. His father, John Isaac Parsons, also worked the hay, prune, and apple ranch. Tom's father, Wil Parsons, was a realtor. Today, Tom owns a construction company, and on their 15.5-acre property in Fulton, he tends to an 8.5-acre vineyard that produces pinot noir grapes. With his wife, Kelley, who grows and sells hydroponic tomatoes, they call their business Parsons Homegrown.

The horses and mules also connect the Parsons generations. In the mid-1800s, Tom's great-grandfather bred Shire horses in Geyserville. In 1941, his grandfather was a charter member of the Sonoma County Trailblazers, the riding and driving club. Tom went on his first Trailblazer Ride in 1987, but it was mules that would become his passion.

Horses go back to Tom's youth when he competed in horse shows with the Rincon Valley 4-H, raised animals for Future Farmers of America (FFA) in high school, took riding lessons at Cloverleaf Ranch in Santa

Rosa, and trail road with his dad. The connection continued when he met Kelley and his future father-in-law, Bill Henthorn, who bred horses and mules.

“I started messing around with the mules with him,” Tom recalled about Bill, who today is 94. “I was around horses literally all my life. Mules are easier to be around. They don't get themselves in trouble, so less vet bills. They're hardier with less feed requirements.”

Today, his two mule teams are made up of draft mules Dolly and Nelly, and Zoe and Chloe, who came from Michigan.

How far and to what fun places Tom and Kelley can drive the mules out and about in the county is attributed to his having lived here all his life. He knows where to go, and he is adept at finding adventure. His mules pull the Trailblazer wagon on rides and drove the grand marshal at the Fortuna Rodeo. More unusual, the mules pull a Limbar and Caisson wagon, which provides a casket with the transportation to a funeral.

Tom, however, is most appreciated for his contributions to the county's youth agriculture programs. An alumnus of these programs, so too was his daughter Brooke, Santa Rosa, and son Mitch, Jackson, Wyoming, who showed horses, market lambs, dairy replacement heifers, and steers with 4-H.

Last year, Tom was awarded the Shining Star Award by the Youth Ag Leadership (formerly Sonoma County



4-H Foundation) for his fundraising efforts. Often, his mules help to raise money by hosting vineyard tours and dinners at their home in Fulton, particularly raising funds for youth scholarships. He also has served as president of the organization.

Mostly, Tom takes Dolly, Nelly, Zoe, and Chloe on the roads

around Fulton, out and about at a friend's place in Geyserville, and the Dolcini ranch in Marin County, creating a sight reminiscent of the North Bay back in the day, generations ago when Tom's family settled here from back East.





A massive oak tree at H2 Stables in Santa Rosa was dropping limbs like leaves and needed to come down. However, since the once beautiful tree was well known to boarders and visitors, owner Heidi Jacquin devised a way to keep it around.

The tree became a sculpture depicting the barn logo under the masterful hands of artist Deyvon Harrison and his mighty chainsaw.

The tree is taken down, cut into parts, and reassembled on top of a foundation that will keep it from rotting or toppling. Heidi's horse Moon modeled for the sculpture.



Wire sculpture at Cottage Gardens in Petaluma



Recycled metal makes up these sculptures created in Tijuana, Mexico, for Pronzini Tree Farm and visible from the road at 3795 Adobe Road, Petaluma. Visitors are welcome onto the property for a close-up view of these life-size pieces.



# Horse Sculpture in Sonoma

PHOTOS BY PATTI SCHOFER







"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 judges simply judges?



## EAST MEETS WEST

For this issue, we chatted about horse show judging, seeking a perspective from one in the English hunter world and one from the western reining universe.

**MELISSA KALEMBER (MK):** a U.S. Equestrian Federation R judge, Sacramento Area Hunter Jumper Association (SAHJA) judge, USHJA certified trainer, and certified equine massage therapist, and Reiki I master. She is co-chair of the USHJA National Affiliate Committee and serves on the USHJA Regional Committee for Zone 10. Melissa obtained her bachelor of science from the University of California Davis in animal science in 2007, specializing in equine science.

**OLLIE GALLIGAN (OG):** a reining trainer who runs Galligan Performance Horses out of his Sliding Spot Ranch in Petaluma. Past president of the West Coast Reining Association, Ollie today is a National Reining Horse Association judge. A native of Ireland who has lived in Sonoma County since 2000, one of his proudest accomplishments was to be the first person to represent Ireland in reining at the 2010 FEI World Equestrian Games held in Kentucky.

### HJ: Do you Keep a Go Bag Ready, Prepacked with Everything you Might Need at a Show you are Judging?

**MK:** I have a bag that is filled with several clipboards, a pencil bag that has five fully loaded mechanical pencils, a few pens, chapstick, hair ties, and toothpicks.

I also always bring a toiletry bag that has deodorant, sunblock, and hand-sanitizing wet wipes. I usually have a magazine or two, so if there's like a ring conflict and a little downtime, I can scroll through a magazine. I also have scratch paper to keep an order of go if I'm calling back horses for a work-off or hunter derby.

**OG:** I do now. I got a pretty good scare last summer when I was heading to Montana, and that national backlog of luggage happened. My flight got canceled and I couldn't find my bag to get on the next plane. I was going to call to get someone to fill in for me so that I could gather up clothes for a week of judging. All I had was my hat in my hand. It was a pretty good learning experience that I should have essential stuff to at least get through the first day I'm judging. I was having panic attacks. Not good

Now I have my judging backpack with everything in there but the kitchen sink. I carry little stuff that I may need when I'm working all those late night or morning shows, everything like measuring tapes and Tums in case you get heartburn from show food.

### HJ: What do you Love About Judging?

**MK:** I love watching horses that love their job and are able to perform it like a horse that's bred to be a fancy hunter who goes over those beautiful hunter jumps. It's a treat to watch. For the classes that are judged on the rider, I love it when the riders come in, and you know they practiced and have a plan, and they go in and execute it, and it works out how they wanted it to, and they get rewarded for their good riding and horsemanship. You get to feel from them how well their hard work paid off.

**OG:** Becoming a judge was a huge goal for me. It challenged me to expand my talents, to study hard, and to see if I could get through the exam. I always thought being a judge was really cool because you have an extra education for coaching your clients.

Some people think we're there to crucify them. But I'm a very positive judge. I'm there to help them. I smile at them when they come into the arena to help them

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relax, and I get a kick out of helping. Some of us just have that kind of personality, and we should use our strengths to empower others.

I do think in general, and there are exceptions, that judges who don't train, ride, and show horses and know what it takes to do it, are at a handicap. I know how hard it is in the middle of that arena, I know what they went through to get it to that point.

There are so many judges, and we're all different. When I'm judging with other judges, I feel that we are close enough to be getting the obvious positives and errors, which shows consistency, but isn't it nice we all have our own likes and dislikes? There are so many different styles and breeds of horses, and they all carry themselves differently.

### HJ: What Would you Like to Change About Judging?

**MK:** I'm thinking about something I don't like about judging, but I'm not sure judges are the ones that can change it. But then we are responsible. You want the horse to look happy doing its job and not like a machine. However, the way judging criteria is you have to pick the best out of the class that makes the least mistakes. Sometimes those can be the ones that are dulled down or lunged to death in the morning. You have to place these horses that you know maybe aren't so happy to be doing their jobs, but possibly they are the ones with the least mistakes. It's hard because then you don't want to reward that kind of horsemanship.

**OG:** It used to be harder because of the schedule that included long hours. Now people are realizing that they need to make the shows run over more days, which alleviates the long daily schedule. When judges are in the chair from eight in the morning to the middle of the night the next day, it's not good for anybody. Twelve to fifteen hours make a long day.

The judge's life is pretty tough, and I don't know that everyone realizes that. You have to be able to get along with other people because you are judging in so many different situations with many personalities and then you go out to dinner and work alongside these people for a good week. Some judges have been judging for years, and that's pretty much what they do. I'm doing it very casually. It is a fun thing for me to do. If I get four

jobs a year that's plenty for me. When you're judging, you're using up those weekends that you might have for family as well as for competing yourself and with clients.

Some judges have been judging for years, and that's pretty much what they do. I'm doing it to supplement my existing business and to keep my skills sharp. It is a fun thing for me to do. If I get four jobs a year that's plenty for me.

### HJ: What are the Characteristics that Make a Good Judge?

**MK:** You have to be open and fair. You have to judge as if you don't know the horses or riders in the ring, but sometimes we do either know them or know of them, especially through social media. So I think a good judge is one that has a fresh perspective with every class and every rider and doesn't carry the past or bring a big name into it. I just judge what's in front of me at the moment.

**OG:** You know that people on the sidelines are the best judges in the world! If I'm sitting in the stands just watching, people will turn around and ask me what I would do with this or that which just happened in the arena. But I can't answer the question because I'm not judging. With judging, you have to be in the chair focused, paying attention, and in the judging frame of mind. You can't be talking to someone and then glance over and judge.

If you're in the chair, it's 100 percent commitment to judging the person in front of you. It's a unique talent to have the patience and the focus to give the person in the arena the best you can for those five minutes. It is definitely not for everybody.

If you judge from eight in the morning, will you as a judge still score the same at 5:00 o'clock, at 9:00 o'clock at night, or at 12 at night? That's the hardest part. You have your scale; you try to be fair and stick to it. You've seen a lot of horses that day, and you're trying to be consistent across the board. Then there is the judge who got sick on the plane and isn't feeling well, or got bad news on the way to the show but is doing everything they can to do the best job. Everyone's fighting something.

*"If it were easy, everybody would be doing it."*

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# DREAMS OF RIDING IN THE WIDE OPEN



In 1978 Tressa Boulden-Linsley, seven years old, rode fields that now make up the site of Wal-Mart.

Photo courtesy of Tressa Boulden-Linsley



In the late 80s, fourth-generation Sonoman Tressa Boulden-Linsley of Sebastopol and her friend from Graton spent their weekends trail riding the apple-filled landscapes of Sebastopol. "There wasn't much territory of the west county landscapes that we didn't cover," she recalls. "Most of our meals were picked off the apple trees or berry bushes; on occasion, we would pack a sandwich." And once, they rode through the McDonald's drive-thru.

Unfortunately, today, the ability to ride unfettered through privately owned property has all but disappeared. Unlike Tressa and her friend, who exchanged friendly waves with landowners as they traversed orchards, meadows, and front yards, stories now abound with riders being chased by angry people in trucks, on foot, accompanied by dogs, and sometimes with guns.

Can you ride across private land? Not exactly. But even if you can, you likely should not.

California Penal Code §602.8(a) states, in summary, that any person who willfully enters land enclosed by a

fence or under cultivation without written permission is guilty of an infraction or misdemeanor.

"Enclosed by a fence" is clear enough. "Under cultivation" in Sonoma County likely means a vineyard or orchard. The theory here is that if a property is planted with grapes or apples, it should be obvious that the property is not public property. The fact that the land is being farmed makes a fence unnecessary to give notice that you have strayed onto private property.

In plain words, if you ride on private land, without written permission of the property owner or person in lawful possession of the land, such as a tenant, you are guilty of trespassing.

## But There's No Fence and No Signs

Unfenced lands must have "No Trespassing" signs according to California Penal Code §602(l). The law specifies, "signs forbidding trespass are displayed at intervals not less than three to the mile along all exterior boundaries and at all roads and trails entering the lands." The law does not state specific requirements for the size or wording on "No Trespassing" signs.

Say that the land is not obviously under cultivation. No grapevines or apple trees lined up in neat rows. You do not see any "No Trespassing" signs, and there's no fence. There's just a beautiful open meadow that looks perfect for a trot or gallop across. There's not even a house in sight where you could go to ask for written permission. Furthermore, you've even ridden there before.

## "L" Stands for Liability

In general, California law protects landowners over people on their land with or without permission.

California Civil Code §846(a) states, in summary, that a landowner owes no duty of care to keep the premises safe for entry or use by others for any recreational purpose. California Civil Code §846(b) specifically includes "riding, including animal riding," i.e., horseback riding, in its definition of "recreational purposes."

"Duty of care" is the legal requirement that a person acts toward the public with the "watchfulness, attention, caution, and prudence" that a "reasonable person" in the same circumstances would use.

The code further clarifies by stating that landowners are not required to give any warnings of hazardous conditions of the land itself, uses of the land, structures, or activities on their land to persons entering for a recreational purpose.

Understand that whether you are riding on private land *with or without permission*, the landowner or tenant has *no responsibility* to warn you of any dangers you may encounter on their land. "Dangers" include anything and everything you can imagine: poor footing, gopher holes, old fencing that may be hidden in tall grass, dogs, cattle, and wild animals. The list is endless.

Not only do landowners have no responsibility to warn people of potentially dangerous conditions, but under California law, they also have zero liability if you or your horse are injured. This is true even if you have permission to ride on their property.

To sum it up, you are riding at your own risk. Landowners will not be held liable for any injury to you or your horse regardless if you have permission to be there.

## If the Liability Issue Is Not Enough to Dissuade You

According to certified California naturalist and horse-woman Sarah Reid,

1. A landowner gives you permission to ride on their land but sells the land and neglects to tell either you or the new owner. Suddenly, you are confronted by the new owners who are not aware you have permission. They may not take the time to listen to your explanation.
2. You or your horse have an emergency. Do you know how first responders can access the property to help you? Do you have a plan for the possibility of poor or zero cell signal?
3. You need also to be aware of situations on the neighbor's property. Do the neighbors have livestock, camels, or llamas that may distress your horse or become distressed at the sight of your horse?
4. Is hunting allowed on any of the adjacent properties? A .22 caliber bullet can travel over one mile.

Just because a property was safe to ride on yesterday does not mean it is safe today.

## So Where Can You Ride?

Twenty of the fifty Sonoma County parks allow horseback riding. Among the popular ones are Helen Putnam (Petaluma), Shiloh (Windsor), Tolay (Petaluma), Ragle Ranch (Sebastopol), Riverfront (Healdsburg), Trione-Annadel State Park (Santa Rosa), and Lake Sonoma (Geyserville).

For a complete list of Sonoma County Regional Parks that have equestrian trails, go to <https://parks.sonomacounty.ca.gov/visit/find-a-park>. On the website go to the "Show Parks With:" menu on the right, click "Equestrian Trails" and then "Find Parks".

For information on Trione-Annadel State Park, go to: [https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=480](https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=480)

Information on Lake Sonoma can be found at: <https://www.spn.usace.army.mil/Missions/Recreation/Lake-Sonoma/Trails/> (Note that trails in Lake Sonoma are generally closed to equestrians during the wet season, generally from November through April.



However, Sonoma County does not have equestrian-only trails. Therefore, equestrians should expect to encounter other trail users – mountain bikers, e-bikes, runners, hikers, and dogs- on and off-leash.

Many of our county parks have horse trailer parking. Be aware that this does not mean other park users will not park there. County parks are popular, and parking lots can get busy on beautiful Sonoma County days. Visit your chosen park beforehand, without your horse trailer, to investigate the parking situation and other equestrian facilities.

### Is Anything Being Done to Improve Equestrian Access?

According to Sarah Reid there are no current plans to improve issues around equestrian trail access in Sonoma County.

First and foremost, we need to be responsible users of our county parks and trails. How do we do that?

1. Be kind and courteous to fellow trail users. Yes, other trail users are supposed to yield to horses. Many do. Towards those that do not, remain calm and kind. If you do have the opportunity for a quick conversation, offer polite education. Remember that not everyone knows how to behave around a horse.

2. Train your horse before heading out. Desensitize them and ensure they will be sensible about the people, other animals, and things you will likely meet on the trail.

3. Pick up after your horse on trails and in parking lots.

4. If you or your horse are new to trail riding, go with an experienced horse and rider team.

5. Use the buddy system. Riding is always more fun with friends.

6. Wear highly visible colors and a helmet. Many of the parks in Sonoma County become rural quickly; it can take some time for first responders to reach you in case of an emergency.

7. Always tell someone where you are going, when you are heading out, and what time you expect to return to your trailer.

### Takeaway Message

Riding on private property is simply not advised. Legally, unless you have a solid agreement with the landowner, riding on private property amounts to trespassing, and landowners will not be held liable for any injury to you or your horse. Even if you have permission, you are riding at your own risk.

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# WHY BOTHER WITH OTHER HORSE SPORTS?

BY LISA THOMAS

In just about any equestrian sport, a horse that gets bored with too much of the same work can become 'ring sour', not want to work, and act out in competitive situations. These horses were often drilled over and over again with the same exercises. Sometimes we humans concentrate too much on what we want to achieve with our horses and don't really check in on how they are reacting to it. This turns out to be true in almost all riding disciplines.

Many professional equestrians find cross-training as the best thing you can do with any horse. By definition, cross-training is expanding your riding to incorporate other exercises and to work different muscles that are not usually addressed in your normal routine. If you're trying to improve stamina, athleticism, coordination, attitude, and even the skill used for your main sport, cross-training is a great start.

Often people are surprised that I take my Andalusian dressage horse out exploring trails where we both enjoy long gallops, and horse camping. 'Aren't you worried he'll get hurt?' I'm usually asked. Sometimes I hear the confession, 'I'd be terrified to do that with my competition horse!'

A horse that is athletic and fit for the job will likely not be hurt, providing good sense is used to choose where you take him. In 30 years of horses, I've only had injuries due to arena work and never an injury on the trail. I've found trail riding adds interest to the horses' time with you, improves stamina and muscular strength, and uses hills and gallops for conditioning.

Other cross-training ideas also add interest to your time together and strengthen your bond while you work on your horse's fitness and athleticism.

## NATURAL HORSEMANSHIP TRAINING

Level 3 Parelli trainer Bill Schnuerle focuses on helping his students develop long-lasting relationships with their horses.

"Make it fun for your horse," Bill said. "Teach him the fundamentals and then put it into a game. This will cheer up his mental outlook and give him a fun way to practice what you're teaching."

Bill considers that what we do in the arena should work on the trail. Being able to move all four legs either forward, backward, or sideways is critical for safe trail riding and you can find a lot of games to practice this.

Bill often holds group classes where the horses and people interact in the exercises. One of his favorites is 'Open the Gate.' Two horses face each other. Their job is to back up to open the gate and then move forward to close it. At the same time, the other horses are trotting around the arena and if the gate is open, they can trot through. If not, they go around. A closed gate is an obstacle that has to be negotiated.

Another favorite is to put a horse in the middle of the arena and either turn the horse in a circle on his forehand or hindquarters, whichever you're working on. The second horse is walking in a circle around him.



**Bill Schnuerle, Level 3 Parelli training, works on horsemanship with students.** Photo by Debbie Weigmann

Both horses have to face each other throughout the exercise. This keeps them moving on your command and learning turns while keeping their attention on you and the other horse. If you run out of ideas, find more on YouTube.com.

Bill feels it's critical to spend some time getting inside your horse's head, to think about how he feels, sees, and thinks about the world. This will make you both more confident together.

## CAVALETTI WORK FOR ALL HORSES

Erika Jansson of EJ Dressage graduated at the top of her class at the prestigious Swedish Flyinge National Stud, worked as an auction rider for the Hanoverian Society in Germany, and has ridden and trained dressage horses all over the world. She is currently training in Santa Rosa and traveling all over the US, Canada, and Sweden with her cavaletti clinic program.

"I recommend all horses cross-train over cavaletti, ground poles set up in patterns which require the horse's attention and encourage athleticism in helping them to use their bodies in a specific exercise. We start with flat poles in a straight line or curves until the horse gets used to them and then raise them on blocks to force them to pick up their feet, which in turn makes them use their back and hind end. It's a very demanding form of exercise (think spin class) but helps develop power and musculature to help with almost any sport. Cavaletti work requires the horse to lift up and move forward. It's hard work but great for strengthening the abdominals, and that improves and strengthens the top line of your horse.

"Horses seem to love cavaletti. It's different, it's fun, and in a class, they get to work and play with other horses, which is not always an option in their daily routine. Interestingly, dressage horses are often the poorest performers because they don't usually move over obstacles. Morgans and mustangs typically do best as they generally know where their feet are at all times," said Erika whose philosophy is that cavaletti training is good for all breeds, Levels, and disciplines.



**Erika Jansson has set up a grid of cavaletti for a student.** Photo courtesy of Erika Jansson

## FROM THE MEDICAL POINT OF VIEW

From a vet's perspective, "Whatever type of riding you do, you're working your horse on specific muscle groups, but not necessarily the whole horse," notes Dr. Grant Miller. "This can often lead to musculoskeletal weaknesses and injuries. Repetitively drilling the same exercises does not physically develop the horse's entire body and can lead to fatigue due to overexertion."

Dr. Miller feels that we often underestimate the demand we place on our horses during training. He's a strong proponent of taking proactive measures to mitigate injury. – joint supplements, good nutrition, and bodywork like massage, acupuncture, and chiropractic.

"Too much of any one exercise may not be a good thing," he says. Performance sport horses experience a lot of issues with backs, hocks, sacroiliac joints, fetlocks and sometimes necks taking a lot of strain. Mitigating injuries with some alternative training exercises can improve their body's ability to stay sound and recover quickly. He also recognizes that the mental outlook of your horse can be much improved by some variety in the routine.

## VARIETY IN TRAINING

Western training Melissa Zanetti of Zanetti Performance Horses focuses on developing Quarter Horses who can compete in multiple disciplines. "It's important to evaluate each horse as an individual and tailor the workout to meet their needs. They will tell you what they are good at and enjoy. Typically, our riders will enter several different events at a horse show, ranging from reining and ranch riding to horsemanship, Western riding, and trail to pleasure classes. These classes require different skills, and the horse has to physically develop in different ways to be successful across the board."

The Zanettis don't encourage trail riding as most clients with top show horses are concerned to risk their soundness on uncertain terrain. They find the variety of the work they do with their horses to be most helpful. "Our goal is to keep the horses happy and healthy for a long, long time."

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# WITH THE ARRIVAL OF SPRING COMES Equine Allergies

Spring, for many of us, is glorious. On the other hand, it means runny noses, watery eyes, and a lot of sneezing. While our horses do not get classic “hay fever” like people do, they are also affected by allergies.

Essentially, allergies are an abnormal immune response to an innocuous agent. For example, if we or our horses are infected with the influenza virus, the virus will invade the cells in our upper respiratory tract. In turn, various cells of our immune system will attack those viral-infected cells in an attempt to eliminate the infection. If we inhale pollen that we are allergic to, our immune system launches a similar attack, even though the pollen isn’t actually doing any harm on its own.

Some evidence suggests that a lack of exposure to parasitic and infectious diseases early in life can predispose people and maybe animals to allergies. People who live in underdeveloped countries where parasitic diseases are common have a low incidence of allergies. There may also be a hereditary predisposition to allergies in people and animals. Allergies in horses usually don’t manifest until the horse is three or four years old and tend to worsen every year.

**HIVES** are a relatively common allergic manifestation in horses. These small welts that may appear in large numbers over the horse’s neck and body usually bother the horse’s owner much more than they bother the horse, although occasionally, they can itch. Hives are most commonly caused by insect bites but can result from something applied topically to the horse’s coat or from something the horse inhaled or ate. Some will resolve with no treatment, never to be seen again, while some horses suffer from chronic reoccurring hives.

Identifying the offending allergen likely will require allergy testing with a skin or blood test, which we sometimes use in horses with reoccurring hives. The ideal treatment is to avoid the allergen. Other solutions may include corticosteroids (dexamethasone or prednisolone), antihistamines, or desensitization by injections over years. Exercise often seems to make hives go away, at least temporarily.



This device used for administering inhaled medications for asthmatic horses that don’t respond to environmental control alone is helping this foal who developed an asthmatic response to the smoke caused by the 2017 wildfires.

Photo courtesy of Marsha Busekist

**EQUINE ASTHMA**, aka Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) or Recurrent Airway Disease (RAO), is another allergic disease found in horses. It can cause coughing, elevated respiratory rates, exercise intolerance, and sometimes nasal discharge. It may be mild or severe. Mold spores in hay, especially alfalfa, are a common inciting cause, although dust, in general, seems to aggravate equine asthma.

Treatment should include environmental management to decrease exposure to dust and mold spores. Hay can be soaked to decrease dust, and asthmatic horses should be housed outdoors if possible and as far away from hay barns as possible. Some horses will still need treatment, such as inhaled or oral corticosteroids. Others will benefit from inhaled bronchodilators. Antihistamines are not usually effective.

**INSECT BITE HYPERSENSITIVITY (IBH)** is, unfortunately, a very common allergy. It tends to appear in spring and summer and causes horses to be very itchy on their mane, tail, belly, or almost everywhere. They will usually rub on anything they can find to stop the itch, often rubbing their bellies on the ground or straddling a bush or stump to scratch their itch. Affected horses can rub off their manes, tails, and the hair on their bellies so vigorously as to cause secondary bacterial infection. The most common inciting allergen is saliva from one of the many species of *Culicoides* (gnats, no-see-ums), but several species of flies and mosquitoes can cause IBH.

Treatment should always include insect control. Fly sheets and masks help some horses. Topical or oral corticosteroids are usually very effective. Antihistamines often help. Flaxseed oil seems to help many. Interestingly, horses with equine asthma are over 13 times more likely to get IBH than horses who don’t have it.

BY MICHELLE BEKO, DVM



## 3 Tips: Preparing Your Horse Property for Sale

If you’re planning to sell your horse or country property, you’re likely juggling a mix of excitement and overwhelm. A great way to make sure you’re confident in your decision is to keep these three best practices in mind when prepping your home for the market.

**1. Pre-Listing Inspections:** You don’t want any surprises to come up that could kill a deal. Today the most successful listings come with a complete set of inspections and disclosures so buyers know what to expect before offering.

**2. Shine with Staging:** You may have what feels like an overwhelming amount of space to clean up: barns, an arena, land, and your home all need to be prepped and staged for showings to get top dollar for your home. I recommend starting this process at least 3-6 months before going to market.

**3. Price it Right:** Become familiar with the Sonoma County equestrian market and partner with an agent who specializes in horse and country property to make sure your listing is attractive and strategically positioned in the marketplace.

*“Remember: you’re not selling a horse farm, you’re selling a lifestyle. You want buyers to say “Wow, I dream of living in a place like this.”*

### Thinking of Selling?

Contact me well in advance, so I can provide you with the necessary guidance and recommended resources to make the selling process as profitable and smooth as possible.

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