

# Riding Instructor

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Instructors Association

Summer 2018

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**How Teachers Touch  
the Future and What  
We Get in Return**

**by Didi Arias**

American Riding Instructors Association  
28801 Trenton Ct.  
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## Riding Instructor

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## Kindness Works the Best

By Gincy Self Bucklin

**S**OME YEARS AGO I was attending a seminar at a large teaching establishment. I was in a stall tacking up the horse that had been assigned to me, when a young girl, about 12 or 13 years old, entered the adjacent stall with a bridle in her hand. The horse was still eating his hay, and when she approached him to put on the bridle, the horse, who was quite tall, raised his head so that it was well out of her reach. After a few tries, she left.

A few minutes later she returned with another girl, slightly older. The second girl took the bridle and entered the stall. When the horse again raised his head, she yelled at him and slapped him. He put his ears back, but she was able to get the reins over his head and put the bridle on.

I never forgot that incident, and any time I see a rider, especially a young person, using anger and punishment to get the result she wants, I think that it is sad and unfortunate that so many people are taught, when they take up riding, that control of the horse is based on mastery. And

“mastery” usually means making the horse afraid of you and explains (to me) the following information.

A year or so ago, ARIA published a statistic that I think many of us found astounding—and frightening. It read, “For every 7,000 motorcycle rides, there is one serious accident. For every 650 horseback rides there is one serious accident!” (Which is why riding instructor liability insurance is so expensive!)

During the more than 25 years that I taught and managed a stable full time, with four instructors and as many as 200 stu-

dents weekly, I can only recall two serious accidents. One involved a woman with a preexisting condition, the other a teenager who did something that I had told her not to do! I attribute this safety record partly to teaching techniques involving riding, but more to the emphasis we put on having a good relationship with the horse. A good relationship is built, not on “being the boss” and “don’t let him get away with that,” but on mutual caring and trust.

*Because you cannot control a horse who really doesn’t want you to!* Horses are so much bigger and stronger than we are, that if the horse feels really threatened, he is going to do whatever he feels he needs to do to be safe. I once watched as four big strong men tried for two hours to force a horse onto a trailer. They lost, and the horse finally left on a six-horse van. He was led on by the gentle, experienced driver in about two minutes. ►

(On the other hand, horses seem to be able to distinguish between deliberate meanness and ignorance. I have known horse owners who either rode or handled the horses in clumsy ways that made the horse really uncomfortable, but the horse put up with it because he understood that the human really cared about him and didn't mean to hurt him.)

Of course that sort of ignorance should not be allowed to continue either. For it is probably the case in most instances that *ignorance causes aggressive methods*. If you don't know the way to teach the horse how to respond correctly in a particular situation, it is all too easy to put the blame on him. It then seems reasonable to resort to some sort of force, because the horse is being "bad," and therefore should be punished.

Fortunately, many instructors now use positive reinforcement training; setting up situations in which the horse finds doing the "right" thing results in a reward, which creates a kinder, more willing horse. The

trick lies in teaching the student how to ask for the result she wants, and how to recognize the "try," when the horse starts to give the right answer. Of course these are not skills that can be learned in a day, but they can be started from day one.

My first lesson begins with the Seven Steps\* (which help the student to deal with her natural fear), then approaching the horse, standing close to

him, touching him, moving around him—not usually behind him on the first lesson—and learning to dismount. Period. All of these simple exercises are designed to help

the student overcome her body's natural fear of a very large unfamiliar creature, and I remain very close to her *so that she feels protected*. This is important because even people who would never admit to fear are subject to it in the beginning. It is a reflex and is one cause of aggressive treatment of the horse. (Telling the student to "get over it" doesn't work either!)

There are, of course, many, many skills to be taught. However, I think the following skills should be taught early on, as they are the foundation of others:

- Leading, with emphasis on relative position of horse to leader. I prefer to have a beginner learn to keep the horse's head slightly behind her shoulder, because some horses, recognizing her lack of skill, can break away easily once their head is in front. Then the pull on the line would be back, which is easy for the horse to resist as opposed to a pull to the side or from the front. And the grass looks so good! Transitions and turns follow as the skills develop.

A good relationship  
is built, not on  
"being the boss"  
and "don't let him  
get away with that,"  
but on mutual  
caring and trust.



- This is also the time to introduce the student to the “active hand”—releasing and pulling rather than just pulling. The trick is in the timing: as the horse moves there is a moment when he becomes soft on one side and will give to that rein, followed by a moment when he takes the rein, at which point the rider releases. With practice the rider can control the horse’s speed and direction without causing resistance.
- Using the stick (ground work). Emphasize that the stick is for communication, not punishment. Its use consists of asking the horse to increase speed gradually, starting with the lightest tap and increasing as necessary, but never to the point where it causes pain. If she is able to do so, combine use of the stick with the tongue “click.”
- Girthing is not a riding skill, but done incorrectly causes the horse great discomfort and thus potentially dangerous tension. A too-tight girth, because it goes around the horse’s bony rib cage (not his softer abdomen as your belt does) causes unnecessary tension. A saddle on a horse with good conformation—well developed withers, well sprung ribs, and the right relationship between his center and the saddle’s position—will stay in place on the level *without a girth at all*, using only the rider’s weight and centering!

Your student should learn to girth up smoothly until she feels resistance, then the horse should be led out and the girth snugged up again before mounting. As the horse warms up, the girth should be checked several times. (Every student should be taught how to check and adjust the girth while mounted.) The girth should be no tighter than you would tighten your belt. The student should never jerk or try to force the girth tighter.

Conformation must also be considered. If the horse has flat withers or ribs he should *never* be ridden without a snug, properly adjusted breastplate. A saddle that slides back and/or off to one side can lead to a very dangerous and unavoidable rider fall.

There are also horses whose center is further back from the withers than usual, so the saddle places the rider’s center ahead of the horse’s, instead of slightly behind it. This makes it much harder for the horse to balance longitudinally, and interferes especially with jumping. This can only be solved with a crupper, which for some reason many instructors, particularly in show stables, don’t want to use. My students showed horses in cruppers successfully in some very important shows—I don’t think the judges even noticed.

You do have to get the horse accustomed to the crupper, as it makes him tense at first. Use a surcingle rather than a saddle for training. Take your time and watch closely at first to make sure he doesn’t get really scared.

Because it lies against the tender skin under the tail, the crupper must be clean, and fairly fat. Put it on snugly and carefully, making sure there are no tail hairs caught on the underside. Then put him in his stall and give him some hay to eat. As he raises and lowers his head the crupper will pull gently and release, just as it will when he is moving under saddle. Most horses become accustomed to it quickly and his riders will definitely notice the difference.

Finally, *encourage your student to tell you* when she doesn’t understand something, or feels insecure. The more positive support you give her, the faster she will develop confidence and the more successfully she will ride. ■

*\*<http://whatyourhorsewants.com/resources/7-steps/>*




**Books by Gincy Self Bucklin**  
*The Gentle Art of Horseback Riding;*  
*What Your Horse Wants You to Know;*  
*How Your Horse Wants You to Ride;*  
*More How Your Horse Wants You to Ride*

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# On Chasing Perfection

By Laura King, CHt, NLP, and Life Coach

per-fec-tion  
pər'fekSH(ə)n/  
noun

1: the quality or state of being perfect: such as  
a: freedom from fault or defect: flawlessness

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/perfection>

**W**HEN COMPETITIVE RIDERS think about the word *perfection* and the words *freedom from fault or defect*, some part of them, no matter who they are, knows that's not possible. And yet, another part of them strives for it every day, in an unhealthy way. You know what I'm referring to. Their need to be better often translates into a need to be slimmer. Stately means thin, and they can never be thin enough. To make matters worse, some trainers add to the pressure through body-shaming and cultivating disordered thinking around food.

Riders young and not-so-young have so much external pressure. And for many, the internal pressure they impose on themselves is even more dangerous. We have an obligation to try to prevent their impulses and their self-talk from causing damage to their bodies, minds, and self-esteem (to say nothing of their riding and their careers).

But chasing perfection isn't just about food. It's also about imposing a standard that is unreachable in all respects. In my mind the only time we should use the word *perfect* is if it's followed by *enough*. (I wrote an entire book on this topic called *Perfect Enough*!) How does

this apply to training and riding?

First, we need to reframe how we teach and encourage mastery of skills.

“  
Reflect for a  
moment. If you  
were one of your  
students, would you  
feel pressured to be  
perfect?”

Encouraging expertise is realistic and helpful. We know what expertise looks like. It has elements that have been defined. And most important, it is what we are judged on. Most trainers would say that this is what they are doing already. But in my practice, I see far too many young women and even young men suffering from the plague of perfectionism. And some of their trainers have no idea how much damage they are causing because they don't see themselves, so they cannot

possibly see the negative effects of their words and actions.

I don't think I've ever met a trainer who consciously intended to cause harm with his or her words or training strategies. This isn't about bad people, because there's nothing I can do about them. But I can do something about trainers who are wonderful people and mean well and want the best for their students, but who are inadvertently causing harm.

Suspend all judgment for a moment—judgment of yourself and others. See if you can just read the following few questions with curiosity. Just take in the words, for now, and see if they resonate with you at all throughout the day.

1 Do you think about how your words might be received?

Though we can never know for certain what the impact of our words is, and the same is true for our delivery, we can do our level best to communicate with compassion and kindness. Athletes look to their trainers to provide them with not only coaching, but also guidance with regard to the appropriate language for what they are trying to accomplish. Trainers have a responsibility to use language that, when internalized by riders, will uplift, inspire, and motivate. As with parenting styles, the old ways of shaming and ridicule (as well as physical abuse) have been shown to be ineffective, at best.

Reflect for a moment. If you were one of your students, would you feel pressured to be perfect?

If you think the answer might be yes, why is that? You are the only one who knows. Just remember that it is entirely possible that your words become their thoughts.

2 Do you know that you are what you think?

Maybe you do. But let's consider this in the context of your words to your students. If your words become your students' thoughts about themselves, do you see how deep your influence runs in the development of their self-esteem? Do you see how that could help



or hinder their progress as well as how they think about themselves?

3 Do you ever talk about certain emotions being bad or negative?

Your students, you, and I, all have a range of emotions, none of which is bad. Not one of them. Reacting without processing certain emotions can easily lead to regrettable decisions and behaviors, but that's different from emotions being bad. All that means is that there hasn't been adequate training in dealing with difficult emotions. Such training involves noticing when the challenging emotion is arising, knowing what it is, and allowing it to pass without engaging it. That's not easy, particularly at first. But it's necessary if we want to avoid becoming ruled by our emotions.

There is so much trainers can do to shift the conversation away from perfectionism and toward being the obvious expert whose skills include riding as well as knowing how to handle difficult thoughts and emotions. We all want the same thing for our students, and we need to be mindful that our influence is enormous and needs to be considered accordingly. ■



About the author:

To learn more about **Laura King**, go to [www.lauraking-hypnosis.com](http://www.lauraking-hypnosis.com) or [www.summithypnosis.com](http://www.summithypnosis.com).



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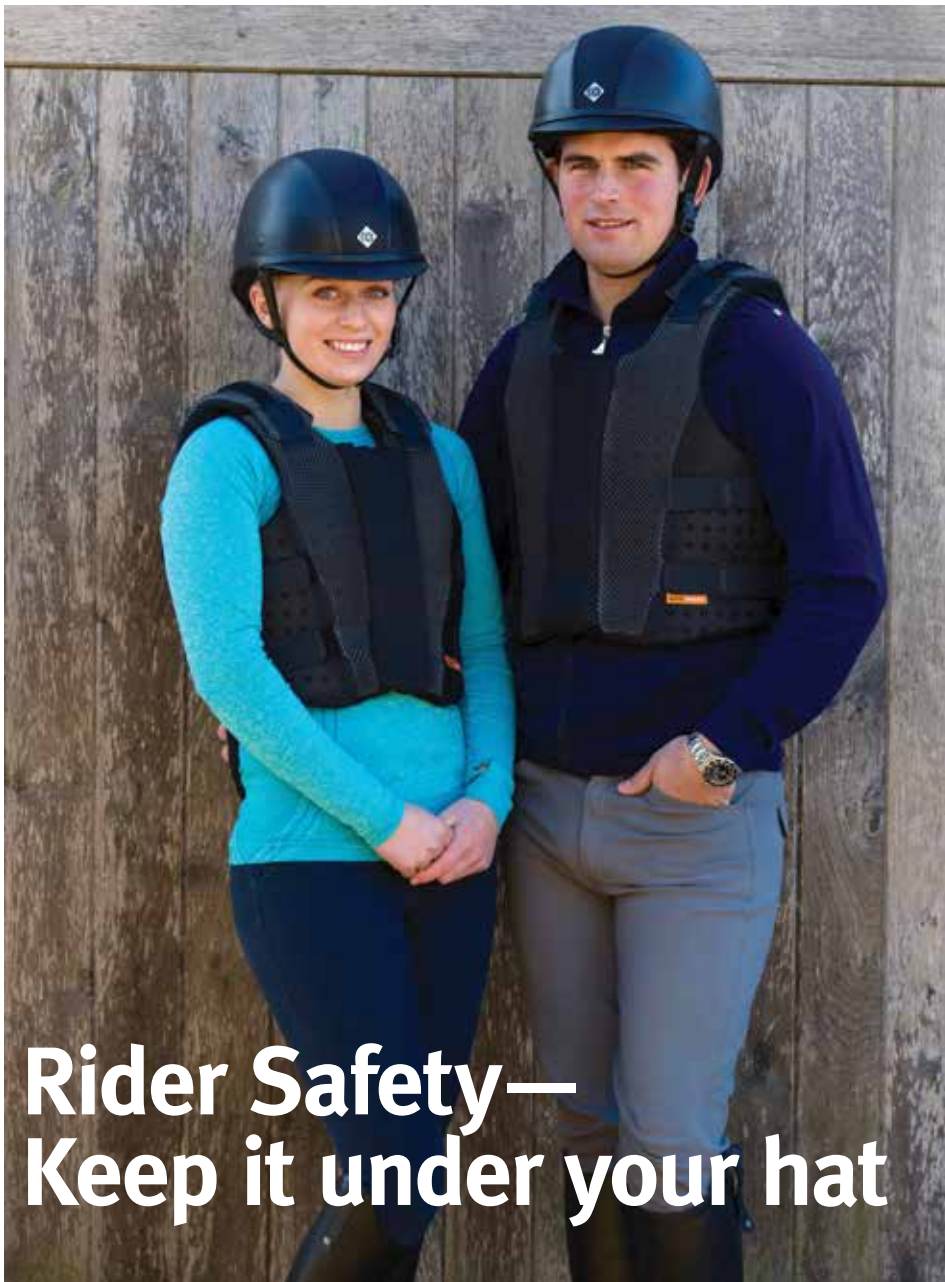
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## Riding Helmets

In the words of Danielle Santos of Charles Owen, “ARIA instructors have a huge impact on their students. They are the educators preserving the profession of riding instructors.” Instructors realize that safety must come before fashion.

When the mother of a student comes to the instructor and says she wants her daughter to ride in her bicycle or ski helmet because she already has it, or a helmet she picked up from an old friend whose daughter used to ride because it was free, the instructor must know how to respond. If parents and students can’t turn to their instructors for safety information, where else can they go? If asked your recommendation for a safe helmet, would you know what to recommend?

Although we want to encourage people to ride, we should not understate the risks involved in the sport. Horses are horses. They are strong, sometimes unpredictable, and even the quietest can react quickly and forcefully. According to [www.riders4helmets.com](http://www.riders4helmets.com), more than 20% of all horse-related accidents reported, mounted or otherwise, resulted in head injuries. Horseback riding accidents account for more hospital visits than skiing, football, or even riding a motorcycle.

Helmets suitable for biking, skiing, baseball, motorcycle riding—none are designed to protect against the risks inherent in horseback riding and the most common injuries that can result. In general, riding helmets cover more of your head, minimize risk to your neck, and can withstand greater degrees of crushing and impact. They take into account the height, trajectory, speed, and types of surfaces most likely encountered in a fall from a horse.

Yet this most common and basic piece of safety equipment is often misunderstood by even seasoned equine professionals.

The first purpose of a helmet is to deflect as much of the energy from a fall as

# Rider Safety— Keep it under your hat

By Kate Selby

**V**IRTUALLY EVERYTHING RIDING INSTRUCTORS TEACH comes with some essential element of safety. Doing things “correctly” usually means doing them safely.

We teach students how to hold a lead rope and walk a horse safely, and where to stand when near a horse. We check tack to look for wear on billets, reins, and other areas. And before students set a foot in a stirrup, we make sure they have a helmet on.





**Left to right:** Traditional velvet hunt cap, dressage-style top hat, English hunting bowler. Seldom seen today, but still in use, all of these were once popular styles of hats worn while riding.

possible, and second to reduce injury from impact via absorption. The process starts with the outside of the helmet. If the outer material can slide upon impact, it helps to reduce injuries, particularly to the neck. Suede and velvet covers allow slip, as do smooth plastic finishes. Rough or matte finishes allow less slip. The outside of the helmet also protects against penetration by sharp objects. Ventilation holes may keep you cool, but those same vents can catch on objects, rather than allow the helmet to slide across a surface, and can allow a stick or the edge of a fence, for example, to penetrate the helmet. Visors shade your eyes from the sun, but also can inhibit visibility. If your helmet has a visor, it should be designed to flex or fold upon impact, reducing the likelihood of neck trauma. Fixed rigid visors do not allow for slip and can cause neck injuries as well as increase the severity of internal head injuries.

The bulk of the helmet, what gives it its shape and thickness, is expanded polystyrene. This material is designed to absorb energy by crushing or crumpling like the crumple zone on a car, to absorb as much energy as possible. It contains microbeads of air that crush on impact in an attempt to protect your brain from bruising or concussion.

This shock-reducing strategy works well in an initial fall, but the damage created will lessen the helmet's effectiveness in future falls. Riders should replace helmets after a fall for full protection.

Foam padding on the inside of the helmet can dissipate some force, but is essentially for fit and comfort. No one wants to wear an uncomfortable helmet!

The woven headband inside the helmet stabilizes the helmet on the head, preventing shifting while allowing the protective parts to move with the scalp and further reduce shearing, or sideways forces.

A technology called Multi-Directional Impact Protection System (MIPS) has recently emerged in riding helmets. MIPS has been used in helmets for biking, motor sports, and snow sports for several years, and has proven to be very effective in reducing brain injury.

MIPS technology has come to the equine industry in the United States through a new company called Trauma Void, distributed by Back on Track, and is now used in helmets by several manufacturers. The MIPS is essentially a separate layer, like an inner liner, that is securely fastened to the inside of a helmet. Back on Track's CEO Bo Lofvander said, "What I really like about the incorporated MIPS technology is that it provides an added layer of support that has been designed to reduce rotational motion transferred to the brain from angled impacts to the head."

## Helmet Standards and Certification

Not all safety gear is created equal, and pieces of equipment are designed for different jobs.

Some safety standards emphasize the ability of the helmet to prevent the most severe types of head injuries a rider may



The MIPS liner inside Back on Track's EQ3 Trauma Void helmet (the yellow layer below coolmax inner liner)—courtesy of Back on Track

experience, while others focus more on protecting against the most common injuries. Some specify tests using greater drop heights, some test different sizes and shapes of both the helmet and the impact points, and others test under different climatic conditions. All helmet standards test impact absorption, the retention system or harness, and the area of coverage with the helmet frozen, hot, and waterlogged. The more standards a helmet meets, the more types of injuries it helps protect against.

Each standard has an independent certification program. In the United States, the ASTM International (formerly ASTM, American Society for Testing and Materials) rating is certified by the Safety Equipment Institute (SEI). SEI requires, in addition to testing for drop and crush, annual audit testing and a factory assessment of quality. ASTM does not test visors. ►



**Above:** Helmets that have the marking “for dress only” or “apparel only,” are not meant for use while riding. **Right:** An Ovation foam body protector, photo courtesy of English Riding Supply.

A helmet should exert a firm, even pressure around the head. The chinstrap should sit just under the chin, not around the throat, and should just touch the skin, not hang down. The front should sit about 1” above the eyebrows. Overall the helmet should be snug enough to move the scalp, but not slip around or pinch. The rubber band on the chinstrap should lie close to the buckle, to stop the strap from lengthening by slipping through the buckle. The harness laces or dial mechanism at the back of the helmet should be tightened until the helmet hugs your head. The harness webbing should lie around and just below the ear to prevent rubbing and ensure a secure fit.



**New or Used?** Buy your helmet new, from a reputable tack store or dealer. Never buy a used helmet—you cannot always tell from the outside if a helmet has been damaged on the inside. And because safety standards are always improving, it’s hard to know how old or outdated a used helmet may be.



### Tips for fitting a body protector

Fit the vest snugly enough to prevent shifting. In front, the top of the vest should reach the top of the sternum, and extend at least 1” (25 mm) below the rib cage. In back, it should not be so long that it hits the cantle of the saddle. The vest should reach all the way around the torso without a gap or overlap. Shoulder protectors should cover the collarbone.

The British Standards Institution (BSI) uses either the Product Approval Specification (PAS) testing, the ASTM, or the Snell international standard, and more recently, the new European standard called VG1. Helmets tested to the PAS, VG1, and Snell standards all undergo additional testing, such as drops from higher heights, impacts on a variety of surfaces, visor flex, and possibility of penetration. Helmets with at least the ASTM/SEI mark are required for all FEI-level events.

No manufacturer can address every specific type of accident or fall a rider may experience. A helmet that meets multiple standards has been proven to provide comprehensive protection and cover a wider range of potential accident scenarios.

### Fit and Style

Even if your helmet is certified, you can still be injured if your helmet does not fit correctly. Each model of riding helmet fits differently, even within one helmet brand, so it is important to try on several helmets with the help of a trained helmet fitter who can ensure you get the best fit for the size and shape of your head, and style for your sport. A new helmet should never rock backwards, forwards, or sideways; a helmet that moves around will offer significantly less protection.

There are several types of equestrian riding helmets available in a range of designs. It is always important to take a look at the rulebook for your sport to see what type of helmet is required. For instance, dressage events require a dark colored helmet or dark cover and helmets must carry the SEI tag.

If you do a lot of cross-country riding, your best bet is a skull cap or an eventing design because these offer more protection along the back and sides of your head. This

also applies to race jockeys. These types of helmets generally don’t have a visor, to maximize visibility. There are even helmets in brown colors and fabrics designed to be more suitable for Western sports.

Helmets are available in many different styles and materials, allowing each rider to choose a helmet that complements his or her own personal style. A helmet fitter can help you decide which type of helmet is suitable for the type of riding you enjoy.

### Pricing

The main factor that *should* influence how much a helmet costs is the level of protection it offers. If the type of riding you do has a minimal amount of risk (not high speed, difficult terrain, possible impact), then a helmet that meets or exceeds the basic safety certification and testing is likely fine. This means that you don’t have to skimp on safety to save money. But beware—some

helmets may look fancier, yet may still only carry a basic level of protection. *Given the same level of testing*, a helmet that costs \$150 is not going to protect you any better than one that costs \$50.

### Helmet Care and Life

Your riding helmet is designed to protect your head and help reduce the chance of

injury by essentially breaking or crushing on impact. Helmets should be replaced following a severe blow. Even being dropped onto a hard surface can compromise your helmet, though it may not look like it. Manufacturers generally agree that helmets should be replaced approximately every five years due to wear and tear and degradation of materials, even if not involved in an accident. To help prolong the life of your helmet, protect it from extreme temperatures, such as being stored in a closed car or horse trailer, avoid placing it where it can fall onto a hard surface,





like a cement barn aisle, and clean it regularly with approved products.

## Body Protectors

Body protectors or vests have been around for about 25 years. According to Amy Gingher from English Riding Supply, "Since vests are most commonly worn for jumping and eventing, and are required for the cross-country phase, those are the disciplines that most vests are designed for; however, they can be used for any equestrian sport."

The main purpose of a safety vest is to reduce torso injuries caused by impacts that may occur during a fall. Although vests can't prevent injuries, they can help soften the blow by compressing and allowing forces to spread out around the body instead of being concentrated in one area. The outer material can also help to protect from injuries such as getting hit with a hoof or against a jump.

There are two main types of body protectors: foam and air. Foam vests are designed to cushion key parts of your body in the event of a fall. Different styles cover different specific areas, but all will protect your rib cage. Shoulder pads on a vest cover the collarbone, and are proven to be effective in preventing or reducing severity of injury. Unlike helmets, foam vests can withstand several incidents and are required by the USEA, USPC, and other organizations.

Foam vests are generally made of two or more layers of PVC nitrile foam. The foam absorbs body heat, which allows it to conform to your body for a better fit and greater ease of movement. After an incident, foam vests should be looked over carefully for dents that might indicate damage or weakening in that area. Look for dents as soon as you can, because the foam will eventually re-expand, hiding any potential damage.

"Air vests" have CO<sub>2</sub> cartridges that inflate in the event you are separated from your horse, instantly giving you protection and a cushion. Each cartridge is only good for one use, so carrying a spare is a great idea.

Air vests should be periodically checked for signs of wear at key points, like the tether that attaches the vest to the saddle, and any area that has sustained damage to the outer fabric, indicating a possible leak.

Foam vests are required in the United States for eventing. Air vests, because of the possibility of air displacement upon impact against an edge (like the top of a jump, or a hoof) or damage if a fall occurs on a rough surface, are best recommended as added protection over a foam vest.

Fit is important with vests, just as with helmets. Find the right size by using your body measurements, and adjust the fastenings at the shoulders and waist. A vest that slides around can be not only uncomfortable, it can actually interfere with your ability to move and react while riding.

When choosing a vest, make sure it is properly certified. Certifications

that exist for vests include the BETA (British Equestrian Trade Association), ASTM/SEI, and the CE/European EN13158 standard.

No sport is free of risk. ARIA instructors can help their students reduce the likelihood of serious injuries by teaching safe habits and requiring riders to properly use safety equipment.

So keep checking your tack, and teaching those barn rules. And if anyone questions why they need to wear a helmet, or can't wear the one they found at a yard sale, now you can give them the answers. ■

About the author:

**Kate Selby** is an ARIA Level III instructor in Dressage and Hunt Seat and winner of the ARIA Instructor of the Year.

For more information and stories of how helmets have saved peoples' lives, visit: [www.riders4helmets.com](http://www.riders4helmets.com).

## Charles Owen and Airowear



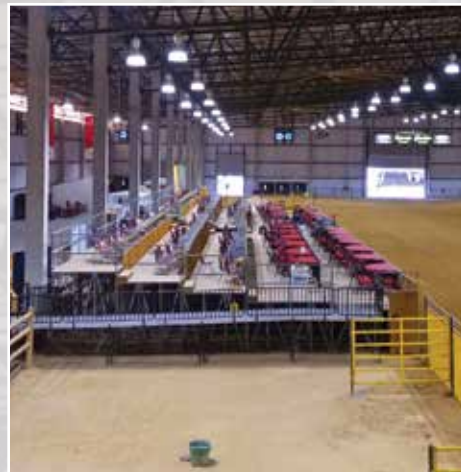
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# Troubleshooting Arena Hazards



## Arena Perfection

How Your Arena Can Score a “10” With Your Clients

By Diane Rice

Images courtesy of Ford Idaho Horse Park, Nampa, Idaho.

**Y**OU’VE PROBABLY HEARD the saying, “Perception is reality.” So when it comes to your students’ riding experience at your facility (and consequently, their likelihood of passing on positive feedback to potential clients), the quality of your arena can make or break your students’ perception and your business’s outlook.

If your arena is plagued with one or more common hazards that keep your students from fully enjoying their riding experience—or worse, that jeopardize their safety and the safety and soundness of their horses—read on to learn how to fix those problems and perfect your arena’s surface.

### Arena Construction 101

By gaining a basic understanding of arena construction, materials, and their functions, you can make better decisions when it comes to correcting any problems you have with your existing arena. And if you don’t yet have your arena, understanding arena basics can help you plan for your future dream domain.

Where you live will influence your base, drainage, and footing needs. Although arenas in drier, sandy, or sandy loam areas might perform satisfactorily without installing a sophisticated drainage system, those in wetter areas with heavy clay will become unusable swamps if they’re not equipped with one or more methods to divert water. And although one footing material will perform extremely well in one area, in another area that same material may be a poor choice.

Your arena consists of a series of layers, each of which contributes to its ongoing condition and serviceability. From the bottom up, these layers are:

- **Sub-base**—Level clay or compacted site subsoil. That sounds fairly straightforward, but Glynnie Walford, CEO of Martin Collins USA, a leading global arena surfaces company with FEI-approved footing, said that because of the variety of soils across geographic areas, her company gives generalized advice to potential clients, then recommends a Martin Collins approved subcontractor who would be familiar with a particular area’s soil composition. “A heavy clay—aka gumbo—can heave, or swell, when wet, and contract when dry, which inhibits drainage and in severe cases, can come up through the riding surface,” she said. In contrast, a client in eastern Tennessee is having to blast rock away from his site. “If you’re building an arena on heavy or rocky ground, the best money you’ll ever spend is on getting an engineer’s report, obtained by drilling bore holes to a sufficient depth to know what’s beneath that ground. If there’s nowhere else to put your arena, at least you’ll know what you’re working with.”

Cynthia Brewster-Keating, National Account Manager of GGT Footing™, said their team has a discussion with each new client to determine the client’s needs. Some require a full all-weather draining arena, but other people can afford to wait





until their arena dries out because they have alternative riding locations. “Many times we do recommend involving one of our arena specialists to advise on various options for the perfect arena for your needs,” Cynthia said.

- **Drains**—A series of drainage lines (perforated PVC pipe surrounded by gravel, laid in trenches cut into the gravel base layer). A needle-punched geotextile membrane tops the trenches to allow water to seep through while keeping silt and sediment from blocking the drains. The number of lines needed will depend on climate, substrate, and the lay of the land. “If you’re on heavy clay, you’ll need more drain runs than on a sandy or loamy type of subsoil that drains fairly well on its own,” Glynnie said. “We normally cut in drains every 30 feet across the ring and they’ll run to a perimeter drain with outfalls at the lowest point (a pipe draining onto an open area or, in the case of heavy clay, into a land drain that will take the surface water away from your arena).”
- **Base**—A well-drained, level, compacted four- to six-inch-thick layer of clean (without dust or “fines” that could cause the rock to “seal” over time), hard (not susceptible to breaking down with frost) aggregate.

“We strongly encourage our clients to get the actual cost of each aggregate separately and get the shipping cost separately and to know how many inches or tons they are paying for,” Cynthia said. “Sometimes the shipping and cost of the stones is cost prohibitive, and an alternative is our Butterfly Matting system, which would be more beneficial than a typical all-weather arena draining base. The butterfly mats can go down over small pea stone and save hundreds on the cost of stone being hauled into a remote facility.”

Glynnie commented on an alternative base called the Risohorse System and said it is becoming extremely popular in states such as California and Florida.

This ebb-and-flow irrigating system provides constant and consistent moisture in a riding surface while draining rain water automatically. The Risohorse system is also eco friendly, as it uses up to 10 times less water than a topically irrigated arena. This system does not require

the conventional stone, membrane, and drainage pattern.

- **Retaining boards and fencing**—Define the arena’s perimeter (at a height the arena owner can specify), ensure the footing will be encased, and provide an anchor for the next layer: the geotextile fabric.
- **Geotextile fabric membrane**—Attached to your retaining boards and rolled out with six-inch overlaps, the fabric strips are heated to seal and prevent them from working their way loose and up into the riding surface.
- **Road base**—In wetter climates, some people prescribe an additional layer of finer rock base designed to facilitate drainage. However, Glynnie said that in short order, this finer material may in fact seal up and inhibit drainage, or work loose and pop up into your arena surface.
- **Footing**—Loose, well-drained, two to four inches thick (two to three inches for dressage, three to four inches for jumping and other high-speed performance events). The overall advice provided by footing ►



or surface companies varies and you should carry out your own thorough investigation before purchase. Ask the company for referral clients so that you can either speak to them or visit their facility to carry out your own evaluation. Depending on your budget, your climate, soil conditions, the materials available locally, and your personal preferences:

- You can use mainly native soil for your footing and irrigate and work the surface frequently to maintain your desired surface, or
- You can purchase a surface material that meets the needs of the activities you plan for your arena.

### Footing materials:

- **Inorganic components** such as sand, silt, and clay. The most widely used arena footing is sand, frequently combined with other materials to achieve optimum consistency. Cynthia Brewster-Keating said, “SAND is the most important decision in your arena building. Certain sieve requirements and material make-up will have a long-lasting effect on the arena longevity and break down to a dusty environment. GGT Footing™ offers free sand analysis to help clients determine if their existing sand is suitable to be used with the many recipes of GGT Footing™ products.” This free service is also offered by Martin Collins USA.
- **Organic material** such as wood chips, coarse sawdust, or shredded leather
- **Coated products** including wax-, poly-

mer-, or petroleum-based products. In many cases these do not require an irrigation system

- **Additives** such as rubber and fibers can provide a cost-effective solution when added to sand; however, they will require an irrigation system. They offer a more consistent footing provided they are installed and maintained correctly. There are a number of fibers available in the marketplace and again it is wise to carry out your evaluation as mentioned above.
- Because outdoor arenas are exposed to the elements, such as rainwater and snow melt, it is important to carefully consider using a heavier footing material (that won’t float away) than you might use indoors. This also applies to arenas constructed in locations where they are exposed to high winds. Inside, footing that holds moisture longer will cut down on watering needs, as would adding salt or a wax, polymer, or oil coating.

“I tell folks that building an arena is like building a road, except the top layer is cushioned footing material rather than asphalt,” said Eileen Fabian, Ph. D., professor of agricultural engineering at Penn State. “All the preparation for drainage, sub-base, and base ultimately determine the arena’s success or failure.”

In addition to careful construction of your arena, Dr. Fabian recommends providing a “shoulder” of two to three feet—just like a highway—around the perimeter of outdoor arenas to protect the edge.

Now that we’re fluent in “arena,” let’s get down to some specific arena hazards and learn how to handle them.

### Problem: Too Loose

Footing particle size and shape both contribute to compaction, or the lack thereof. Compaction occurs when the spaces between footing particles fill with smaller-sized particles, thus “solidifying” the matrix of particles into a hardened surface. Angular materials like manufactured sand or stone dust are much more prone to compaction (too tight) than rounded (too loose) materials. Your “just-right” particle will be sub-angular: Its corners have been knocked off, forming a good but not-too-tight fit.

Translated: If your footing’s particle sizes are all relatively equal, your surface is less prone to compaction and will instead remain loose, perhaps too loose.

Too-loose footing can be unstable, especially at high speeds and on quick turns. So, to achieve a more solid footing, especially for performance events such as jumping, cutting, and reining, you can vary the mix of particle sizes by adding smaller and/or larger sized particles. When mixed sufficiently, the particles will “marry” and your mixture will eventually compact to the desired consistency.

Note that sand particles are subject to wear over time, making them less angled and more rounded, and contributing to loose footing. Thus, the naturally worn particle shape of beach sand is less desir-





able than the more angular shape of mined sand. And, the broken-off corners of worn sand become dust, or “fines” that you’ll have to control through watering. That being said, if you live in an area where mined sand isn’t available, you’ll have to ship it in (expensive) or adapt the materials that are locally available.

### Problem: Too Hard

Arena footing that’s too hard is at the opposite end of the spectrum from too-loose footing—its particles need to be more standardized to keep them from forming a compact matrix.

Note that as they’re ridden on over time, sand particles wear and slip between larger, more angular particles, resulting in compaction. Wood particles can add cushion and increase moisture-holding capacity when incorporated with sand, but wood also wears and decomposes over time (that is, the particles become smaller), which can contribute to compaction.

Topsoil generally makes a poor arena footing because of its variation in particle size and consistency, also leading to compaction.

Stone dust (aka blue stone, rock dust, limestone screenings, decomposed granite, white stone) is a finer grade of what’s called “road base” used in arena preparation. It drains well and provides good stability, and can function well as footing if it’s worked

frequently and kept watered. However, if not maintained, it will compact and become near-concrete hard and very dusty. When adding stone dust as footing, Dr. Fabian recommended using a narrow range of grade (particle) sizes to prevent compacting.

“Stone dust mixed with rubber will provide a less compactable footing than stone dust alone while keeping the high stability that stone dust offers for quick changes in direction and speeds, such as jump takeoffs and landing activity,” she said, adding that stone dust isn’t a material she recommends if horse owners can afford something more suitable. “It’s very cheap, but very dusty.”

### Problem: Too Slippery

An arena’s footing matrix—the variety of materials in its composition—can alter the surface’s consistency. In particular, the flat shape of clay particles allows them to slide across each other, contributing to a slippery surface when wet. Clay and silt are also more dusty than sand because their particles are super fine, so they easily become airborne. The dust requires more watering, which contributes to the slip factor—a vicious circle.

Wood fibers (hardwood pieces larger than chips or sawdust) interlace, providing good traction when added to the footing matrix. However, according to Dr. Fabian, wood products can be tricky to work with: They must be kept moist to maintain their

adhesive properties. Fully dried all-wood footing can lose its traction and become slippery as the wood becomes more brittle. And, all-wood footing composed of large pieces (greater than one square inch) can become slippery when overly wet.

Remember the principles of compaction. Adding stone dust, ground rubber, or sand would fill matrix voids, improving traction when added to large pieces of wood footing. For overly wet conditions, improving drainage or cutting down on irrigation can cut down on slipperiness.

*Note that walnut and black cherry wood products are toxic to horses, so Dr. Fabian recommended buying from a supplier knowledgeable in equine arena footing.*

### Problem: Too Uneven

Glynnie said that uneven footing can be a base problem. “It could be that the base wasn’t level in the first place, or that it moved or swelled due to high clay content and poor drainage,” she said. “If it’s a base problem, a professional will need to do some remedial work. However, it could be that the footing wasn’t installed to an even, compacted depth throughout or that due to incorrect maintenance, the footing has moved from one area to another.”

She recommended periodic depth checking. “About every four months, take a long screwdriver that you’ve marked in inches ►

and carefully push the tool into the compacted surface to reach the base, being careful not to penetrate the base. Take readings at 10-foot intervals around the track, up the quarter line, center line and three-quarter line, together with some random depths. Record these so you'll be able to see immediately if your surface is becoming uneven. You can then alter your maintenance procedure accordingly."

### Problem: Too deep

At depths of more than six inches, sand—either alone or combined with other footing materials—can stress or injure horses' tendons. Experts at Penn State University<sup>1</sup> recommend starting with about two inches and adding more in half-inch increments until you reach your desired depth.

But if your arena is already built and too deep throughout, depending on the type of footing and overall depth, Glynnie suggested rototilling Martin Collins' CLOPF® fiber into the footing to help build a "root structure," thereby

increasing stability and energy return to the limbs of the horse. "If it's a surface that wasn't installed too deep but now has some areas where the footing is loose and deeper, check your irrigation system thoroughly for leaks or blockages that could be preventing your arena from getting sufficient moisture in those spots.

The correct maintenance of any surface is critical," she added. "A level and consistent footing is key to the well-being of your horse and it should be regularly maintained according to the manufacturer's instructions. We provide ongoing support to our clients and also furnish them with a maintenance DVD at the time of purchase."

Cynthia agreed, "Crucial to the success of any arena is irrigation and a proper groomer."

### Problem: Base Layer Popping Through

Glynnie said that if you can see base or stones coming up through the surface, the

only way to fully investigate and confirm the nature of the problem is to remove the footing. "It could be due to a number of differing problems such as a heavy clay sub-base has heaved through, the underlying membrane has been ripped open, allowing stones from the base to come through, or a stone base has been 'blinded off' with a smaller stone that has worked its way up into the riding surface," she said.

### Problem: Too Wet

If your arena is staying too wet, you might be able to remedy the problem by bolstering your system for carrying water away from your arena. Talk to a professional to determine your options.

### Problem: Too Bright

The ability of ground-up rubber to darken an arena's surface makes it a good glare reducer. Dr. Fabian advised ensuring that any rubber mixed with your arena matrix is free of metal from steel-belted tires, or other foreign materials. "Rubber can be added to a sand or stone dust footing at the



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rate of one to two pounds per square foot of arena,” she said.

### Problem: Stays Frozen Too Long

Again, ground rubber to the rescue. Its dark color absorbs light and heat, thawing the rest of the arena footing matrix more quickly as it does. Consequently, rubber may not be an ideal addition to your footing if you live in a hot climate.

### Problem: Too Abrasive

According to Cynthia, “People in the past used to use screenings and decomposed granite as well as hard stone dust to create a footing. Nowadays this is only considered suitable for a base...too abrasive!” Abrasion can, at the least, cause excessive hoof wear, and at most, take a horse out of competition because of soft-tissue injuries on his legs. Abrasion can be an issue especially with the high-speed stops, spins, and turns of reining and cutting. If your horse has had issues with abrasion, you may want to consider softer, less abrasive footing materials such as wood products or shredded leather.

But abrasion is the tip of the iceberg when it comes to arena-related injuries. According to Carolynne Tranquille, who has studied surface-related injuries at Animal Health Trust in Newmarket, U.K., non-surface factors may include the horse’s age, discipline, training regimes, and competition frequency.

“Based on the results of our investigations ... arenas with deep, boggy, or uneven surfaces increase the risk of lameness, and arenas that are poorly maintained or have no base tend to have negative properties. More frequent arena maintenance reduces the risk of lameness, and our recent work has shown that superficial harrowing and watering alters the properties of the surface and the movement pattern of the horse ... making uniformity across the arena an important goal in surface management.”

When considering how to fix your arena’s problems—or how to construct your arena to avoid problems in the future—you can bypass any costly errors by using the knowledge you’ve gained to evaluate and

fix your arena’s faults, maintain it regularly, and keep it at its optimum condition. ■

#### For more information, please contact:

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**GGT-Footing:** Cynthia Brewster-Keating at 864-804-0011 or email [Cynthia.keating@polysols.com](mailto:Cynthia.keating@polysols.com)

#### Source:

<sup>1</sup>Horse Facilities Publication #6, “Riding Arena Footing Material Selection and Management,” Penn State University, College of Agricultural Sciences, Agricultural Research and Cooperative Extension, (c) 2006. Accessed at <https://extension.psu.edu/riding-arena-footing-material-selection-and-management> on 30 August 2017.

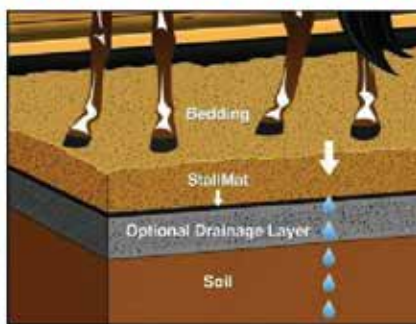


#### About the author:

**Diane E. Rice** earned a bachelor’s degree in agricultural journalism from the University of Wisconsin, then melded her education and her lifelong passion for horses in an editorial position at *Appaloosa Journal*.

She currently works as a freelance writer, editor, proofreader, and photographer and has served on the board of directors of American Horse Publications. Ms Rice spends her spare time gardening, reading, serving in her church, and with her daughters, grandchildren, and pets.

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# How Teachers Touch the Future and What We Get in Return

by Didi Arias



**T**HE REWARDS OF TEACHING RIDING can far outweigh the challenges, especially when working with young students. Experiencing your students' progression is very fulfilling, especially when they spend several years with you and a close bond develops. Many long-term students and even their parents may consider you a sort of family member and share other non-horse related landmarks or special moments with you (my collection of Disney-themed birthday party favors accumulated over the years can attest to this). Eventually the children grow up and go off to college, off to jobs, and sometimes (Heaven forbid) "off" horses; hopefully the last is only temporary.

When students you taught when they were children keep in touch once grown, it shows how much you have meant to them, and that is one of the biggest gifts a teacher can receive as you touch the lives of others. It does not really matter whether they continue with horses; what matters is knowing that they are happy and successfully living their lives.

Some of my riding students have continued their interest in horses and gone on to be horse owners, professional riders, certi-

fied instructors, veterinarians, or to study equine science at university. As I write this article my now-grown student of 17 years is texting me as she boards a plane to embark on an overseas adventure to further her equine veterinary education somewhere out in the Pampas of Argentina. I am as excited as any family member as she sets out on this solo trip away from all that she knows. The fact that she is sharing her journey with me is extremely touching.

Staff Sergeant Bruno Gonzalez Aranda, fore, at the "Carta Credenciales Parade," Plaza Mayor, Madrid, Spain, 2016. Photo courtesy of Bruno Glez.

If pressed to name my personal "Teaching Reward Award," it would be when I learned that two of my now-grown child riders joined the Spanish military and were accepted to the prestigious *Guardia Real*—the mounted Royal Guards, security to King Felipe VI of Spain. Rarely speechless, I was left dumbstruck when I learned of their accomplishments. "You're *what*?" was all I managed to get out when I first saw the evidential photographs. Never one to miss an opportunity and with a quick recovery, I flooded them with "what," "why," and "how" questions, the replies to which developed into this article.

First cousins Bruno Gonzalez Aranda and Guillermo Puche Aranda grew up riding in our school. The boys started riding at seven and five years old, respectively, and until they enlisted, lessons with us were their sole riding experiences. Have you ever



taught one of those kids who forever stays in your mind? Well, Guillermo was one of them for me, as no one has ever matched his record as funniest kid to come through our gates. He also had the astounding ability to fall off more than anyone I have ever known. Fortunately for his chosen line of work, he has gotten over that hurdle, as “undeterred” is a good description of his character. Bruno, on the other hand, was quiet and set personal goals of a high standard because, unlike his cousin who rode all year, he was only able to ride during vacations. His determination stood him in good stead for his future with horses.

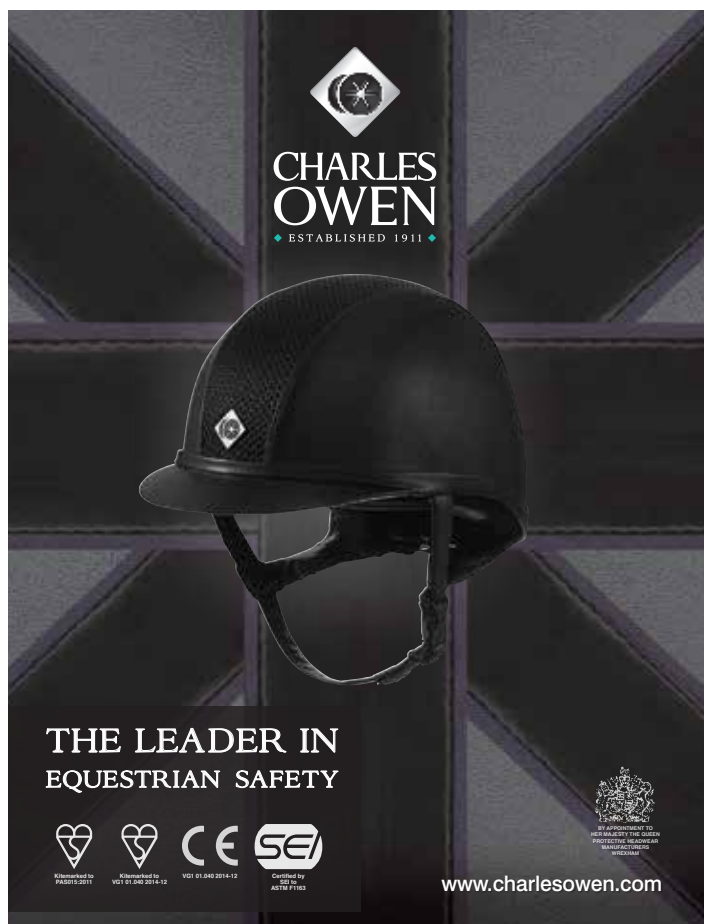
The work of the *Guardia Real* is to serve as security to the King, ride on patrols, perform in exhibitions, and carry out official parade work. Bruno is one of an elite few, having ridden as Royal Guard for *two* Kings, because he came into the Guards before the changeover from King Juan Carlos I to King Felipe VI. The Guards, based in Spain’s capital of Madrid, perform for ambassadors and heads of state and at a variety of other important national celebrations. Their drill team display is a highlighting crowd pleaser of Madrid’s Horse Week each year.

The soldiers are responsible for the general care and feeding of the horses, mucking out, keeping tack in tip top shape, and of course, riding, riding, riding the 150 horses housed at the military facility. Being in charge of the daily duties of the unit, Bruno also trained the horses and riders, helped to plan events and maneuvers, and at times was involved in the selection of new horses coming in from the military stud farms.

Guillermo went straight into the mounted Royal Guards unit when he joined the military, but Bruno was a soldier for five years prior to applying for his position in the Guards. When I asked how their previous riding experience helped them get into the mounted units, interestingly, Bruno responded that in general non-riders were recruited, but that in his case the head of the unit was looking for people with prior experience. He was given a personal interview and a riding evaluation and was accepted to the post as a result of his performance. He was clear that had he not had his prior training he would not have gotten his post, and Guillermo also insisted that he would not have earned his place upon application nor achieved the success he has had in the unit without his previous training.

The military has their own stud farms located in several areas throughout Spain, breeding their own mounts for the Royal Guards as well as for different police units. Without exception, all of the mounts are purebred Andalusians, (*Pura Raza Español* or “PRE”) as they are known here. Asked about selection criteria, Bruno replied that horses are selected by number required and by coat color, with Lancers and the Band of War (musical band) mounted on grays, the Armoured riders on bays, and the Scouts mounted on black horses. Foals are given their names starting with the first letter determined by their year of birth. Most of the colts selected are three years old and for the most part, unhandled.

➤ continued on page 30



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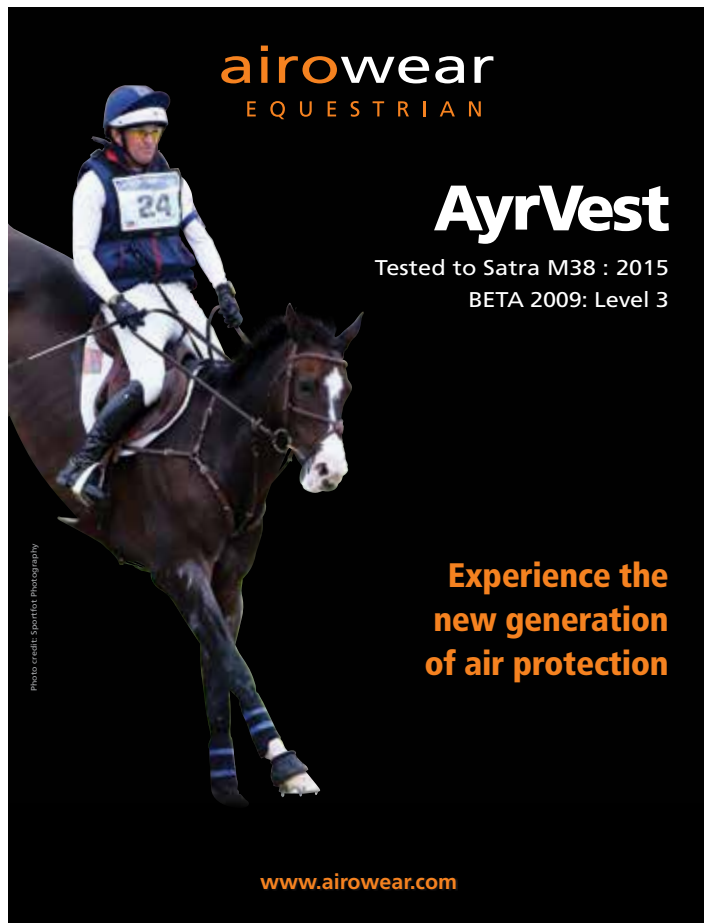
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## American Curly Horses: The Hypoallergenic Lesson Horse

*By Brie Hoblin*

**D**O YOU KNOW A HORSE LOVER who has never been able to learn to ride because of allergies to horses? Have you ever met someone who couldn't have horses because a spouse, child, parent, or other relative was allergic? Have you ever had to tell prospective students that you didn't have an answer for them other than seeing their doctor and taking an inhaler to make it through lessons?

Having an American Curly in your lesson program might offer horse lovers with allergies a safer and more comfortable way to interact with horses. Although every Curly is different, and every person's allergies are different, many horse lovers with significant allergies to horses have found that a Curly works for them.

### What is an American Curly?

This rare breed of horse is something of a mystery, because its origins remain unknown. The breed's history may start in 161 A.D., when curly-coated horses were depicted in art in China. Or possibly it starts in the winter of 1801-1802 when the Sioux stole curly horses from the Crow. The big moment of discovery, as told in Curly horse history books, is when the Damele ranching family spotted curly-coated horses in the mustang herds near their ranch in Eureka, Nevada in 1898. After a very harsh winter in 1932, they noticed that only the four curly-coated horses in the mustang herd had survived the extreme temperatures and harsh conditions.

Theories about the breed's origins vary even now. (In fact, there is a debate as to whether they are truly even a breed or if some horses simply have "Curly traits" from a group of genes that is not tied to one specific breed of horse. Research is ongoing.) Some people believe Curlies are descended from the Lokai horses of Tajikistan. Others claim they are related to the Russian Bashkir Curly (which is not a hypoallergenic breed but looks similar). It is possible that either of these breeds crossed the Bering Strait long ago and evolved into today's American Curly. Curly-coated horses are still found in mustang herds in the United States, with many traceable to North or South Dakota and the Salt Wells Herd Management Area maintained by the Bureau of Land Management in Wyoming.

### The Horse World's Best Kept Secret

Perhaps an ancient spell protects this breed from becoming ruined through overpopularity. Or perhaps there simply aren't enough Curlies in the world to be truly well known. The last population estimate of just 5,000 Curly horses means that perhaps today there are as many as 8,000 or as few as 4,000. In comparison, there are an estimated 5 million Quarter Horses in the

**Above:** Author with Sage, her American Curly gelding. Photo by Ellen Powell.



world today. American Curly horses are extremely rare.

## Why Use a Curly in Your Lesson Program?

The most noticeable thing about Curlies may be their hypoallergenic coat, but arguably the best thing about them is their incredible temperaments. Curlies are known to be good thinkers, and to often think their way through an unfamiliar situation rather than react. Curlies are both smart and kind, gentle and observant. Their one "flaw" may be that although they have a gentle and calm temperament in general, they often enjoy having one special human in their life.

Instructors who have Curlies in their lesson programs have reported that Curlies do an amazing job of sensing the skill level of their rider and adapting accordingly. One instructor uses her Curly both to compete in Third Level dressage and to teach beginner lessons

because her mare adapts so well to different riders. Curlies are already being used in numerous therapeutic riding programs as well, with their patience and attentive nature leading to great success for their riders. Stories

pour in from the Curly horse community about the deeply compassionate nature of their beloved horses and what amaz-

ing horses they are to teach people how to ride.

Curlies are also known to be clownish and curious. These are "in your pocket" horses. Owners of American Curlies report their horses "help" fix fencing, stealing tools out of their pockets or picking them up off the ground. One owner reported her gelding kept moving the ladders of the construction crew at night while they were gone.

One other wonderful Curly trait is that many of them spook in place rather than run when they become frightened. They often spook, and look, and then return to normal. Although no horse is bombproof, owners reported that their horses felt safer to ride on the trails, and often did well with the noise of parades or large events.

## Other Curly Traits?

Curly horses have many unique physical traits as a breed as well, the most notable being that

their coats are made up of a different type of protein than other horses' coats, giving them their unique hypoallergenic properties. The best way to identify a Curly horse is by the curls in their ears, but their fetlocks, eyelashes,

es, mane, and tail are most often curly too. Most Curly horses have curls all over their bodies when they grow their winter ➤

Having an American Curly in your lesson program might offer horse lovers with allergies a safer and more comfortable way to interact with horses.



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coat, which is why they are often referred to as the “poodle horse.” (In the summer many American Curly horses have a smooth body coat but still have curly manes and tails, eyelashes, and ear curls.) It is important to note that Curlies and Cushings horses are not one and the same. Although horses suffering from Cushings disease may grow very long wavy coats, their coats tend to be patchy and they show other signs of Cushings. Only American Curly horses have curls inside their ears.

Curlies as a breed have evolved to be 14 to 15 hands tall and weigh somewhere around 800 to 1,000 pounds. The American Curlies being bred to their original type remain strong, squarely built horses with tough hooves, intelligent slanted eyes, with a build somewhat similar to an old-style Morgan. They are very easy keepers, and usually quite healthy. However, they can be sensitive to vaccines, and often require a lower dose of sedatives, with more time allowed for sedation to occur, because they metabolize sedative drugs differently than other horses.

More recently Curlies have been outcrossed and bred for many different purposes, because horse lovers with allergies do many different things. Today there are breeding programs that focus on breeding American Curly miniature horses, American Curly sporthorses, American Curly gaited horses, and of course, Curly draft horses as well. Curlies are also being

crossed with Arabians to be used for endurance events. The characteristics of Curly crosses may resemble the original Curlies, or the horses they were bred to. Today horse lovers with allergies have a better chance of finding a horse that suits their interests, and is also hypoallergenic, thanks to breeding programs such as these.

### Adding a Curly to Your Lesson Program

If you have a specific student or client in mind who wants to find out if he or she is allergic to a Curly horse you may purchase, or help him or her purchase, the best thing to do is to request a hair sample from that specific horse from the breeder or seller. People then often make an appointment with their allergist to have themselves tested for a reaction to the hair. Many breeders are familiar with this process and can give additional advice. Breeders will send hair samples from multiple horses as well.

Sometimes allergy sufferers prefer to beeline directly for the nearest Curly horse breeder to visit Curlies as soon as possible. Although this is undoubtedly more fun, precautions should still be taken for individuals who experience life-threatening allergic reactions around horses.

### Breed Resources

American Curly horses can be registered with one of two breed registries. The International Curly Horse Organization (<https://www.ichocurlyhorses.com/history>.

<http://www.abcregistry.org/>) will register any Curly horse that has been DNA tested and proven to carry the Curly genes. They often coordinate with the Bureau of Land Management around Curly mustangs that are captured. The older breed registry, known as the American Bashkir Curly Registry (<http://www.abcregistry.org/>), is more restrictive, and focuses more on Curlies of the original type. There is also Curly Sporthorse International (<http://www.curlysporthorse.org/>), which offers programs and inspections for sporthorse type Curlies. Additionally, the website <http://curlyhorsecountry.com/> offers a wide variety of information on Curlies and maintains a photo gallery and sales ads.

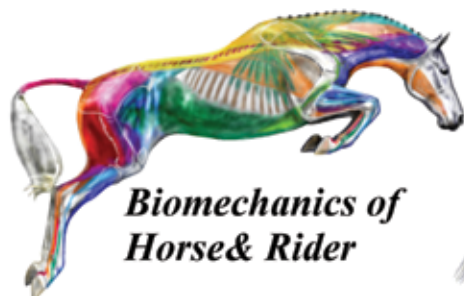
Wherever these mysterious horses come from, and regardless of which breed registry records them, American Curlies are worth their weight in gold. Their calm and curious demeanor, combined with their hypoallergenic coat, make them valuable lesson horses for many programs. For horse lovers who suffer from allergies, the American Curly can offer real hope. For the rest of us, they are simply a gift we choose to cherish. ■

#### About the author:

**Brie Anne Hoblin** is certified in Recreational Riding and Dressage, and has been working with horses for over three decades. She lives in Vermont with her American Curly gelding, Sage. After earning her Bachelor's degree in computer programming, Brie now balances her love of equines with her love of technology. To follow Sage and Brie's adventures, go to [sage\\_majik](#) on Instagram.

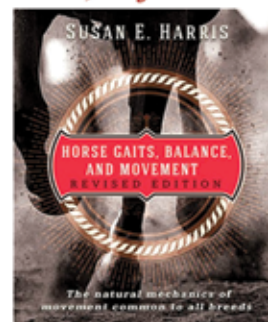
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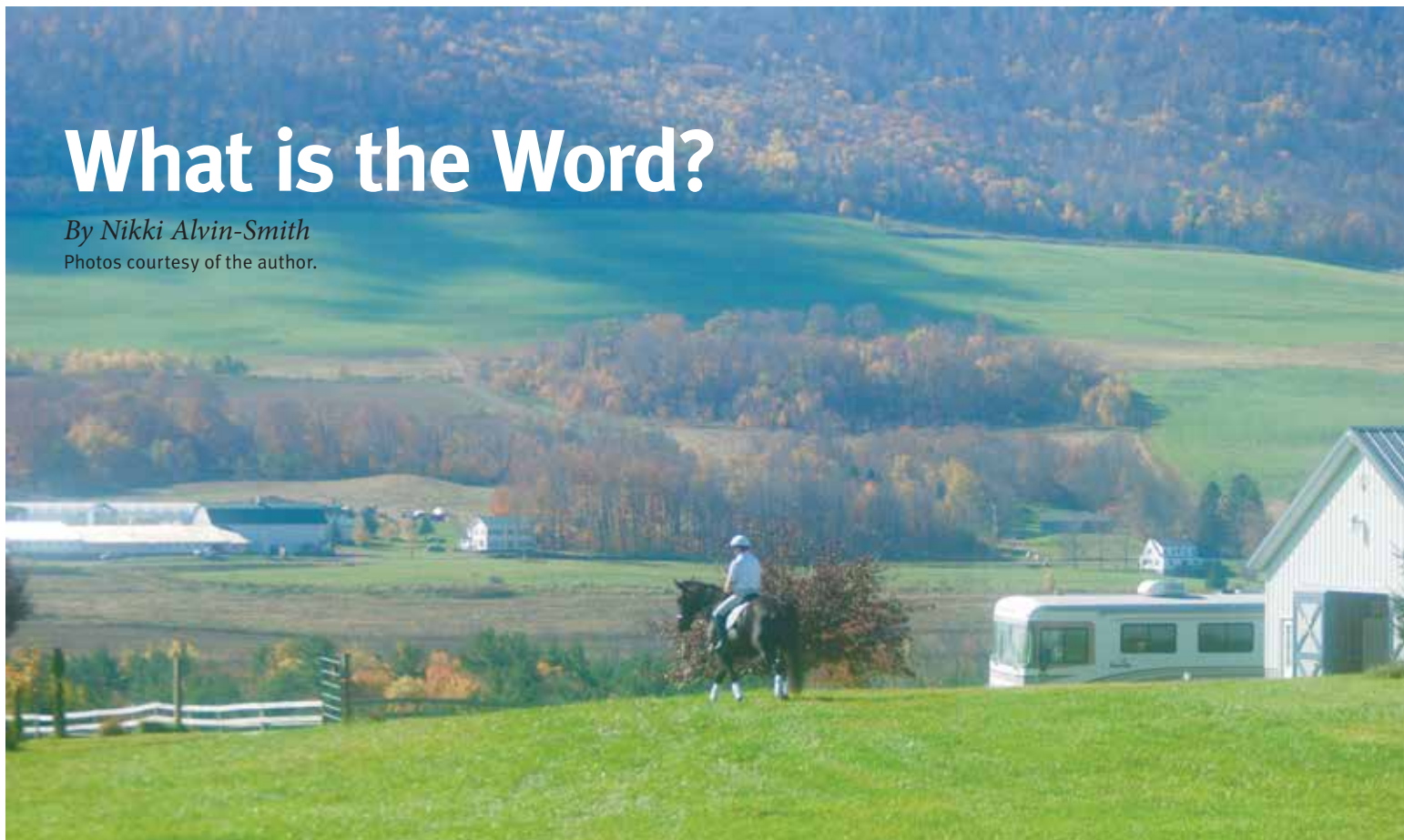
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# What is the Word?

By Nikki Alvin-Smith

Photos courtesy of the author.



**W**HEN YOU STARTED YOUR WORK as a horseback riding instructor and developed a clientele and a business, you probably envisioned hours of fun spent with horses—shows, clinics, time in the center of the ring with adoring loyal students bouncing about around you, horses in and out of your barn and your life. You probably didn't think too much about the legal side of the business, your liability, or your talent off the horse in the realm of running a business.

Most people are good-hearted and kind. However, despite best-laid plans and intentions, bad things can happen. Therefore, you cannot eliminate the necessity for backing up your verbal word with the written word. People can become upset when their horse is hurt or their child suffers an injury. Either you or they may simply forget what the original agreement actually entailed. We are all fallible.

A verbal agreement is enforceable in a court of law, but a written agreement is a far wiser choice. It can eliminate a visit to the

courthouse, will keep your business transparent and on track, and will help you sleep at night. Contracts should be clear, concise, and as simple as possible so they can be easily understood. They should contain no ambiguity and be signed by all relevant parties. Copies of the contracts should be provided to all parties once executed.

This article is intended to offer some advice based on my years of experience in the equine industry but I am not a lawyer, so please consult an attorney with any questions.

Protect your horse business with well-written contracts.

## When Do I Need A Contract?

Wherever money is concerned you should have a contract. Wherever you undertake responsibility for another individual or equine you should have a contract, regardless of whether it is a free lease or free help riding horses or working around the barn, paid or unpaid internships, barter services, or employment.

Obviously if you run a boarding/training/lesson operation then you should have a boarding agreement that details the services you will provide and their cost. If you take a security deposit (which is a good idea), it should spell out when the deposit will be refunded and under what terms. It should state under which state/town jurisdiction any matter of lien or lawsuit must be filed. It should include a detailed description of the horse concerned, the ownership, insurance, and liability responsibilities. The best way to create this document is to ►



A good contract provides a solid fence to protect your horse business.

## Signage Around Your Barn

In addition to written documents for transactions and services, you can add signage around your barn to aid you in keeping things straight. Some insurance companies will require you to post notices with barn rules, no smoking, the requirement for wearing protective headgear, keep dogs on a leash, etc. Other signage can be fun and will encourage folks to sweep the aisle, coil the hose, or shut the gate. Humorous signs work very well. Signage can be a great reminder, but don't post endless signs everywhere or people will feel overwhelmed by rules and regulations.

## How Can You Successfully Resolve Disputes?

Disputes will occur. This is a natural part of doing business and no one is immune from the occasional dispute popping up and spoiling their day, or week.

The best approach is to engage and communicate with your upset party immediately. Stay calm and avoid any inflammatory language or aggressive body posture. Simply ask the person to explain the issue.

Perhaps your client is concerned that his horse is losing weight and blames you for not providing enough hay; perhaps your client is upset that her horse is not progressing quickly enough in its training; perhaps a horse you sold has gone lame and the purchaser claims you knew of the lameness. Whatever the issue, the first course of action should be to listen to the complaint. You do not have to address the complaint right away. Step away and think about it. Do not act in temper or when you are upset. We have all been wrongfully accused and sometimes rightfully accused by others, of not acting as they expected or completing a task. Do not become emotional. Think of it as if you are training a horse or rider. You cannot expect them to understand you better because you shout your aid or command at them instead of communicating calmly and succinctly. It is prudent to take

consult an attorney. However, if you are working on a tight budget, you can often borrow the verbiage from a colleague or poach one online. Be sure that it is comprehensive.

It is a good idea to have a list of barn rules posted in a high visibility spot and to include a copy as part of all agreements. This can be noted in the agreement as an attachment. This way if someone does not follow the barn rules, as a boarder, for example, then you can use their indiscretion (behavior dangerous to others, etc.) as a reason to turf them out of the barn.

If you buy or sell a horse, have a contract that spells out the details of the purchase. It should include price, terms of sale, and names and addresses of all relevant parties. If you are selling a horse you should include "as is" and "where is" in the sale terms. The contract should also indicate there are no warranties express or implied, and state that there are no liens or encumbrances on the horse (if this is the case). Also be sure

to include the state/town jurisdiction for any lawsuit.

Employment contracts are very useful. You can indicate the scope of the work you want completed, which provides a valuable means for terminating employment if you become unhappy with an individual who is not doing his or her job. The hours and pay can be indicated, which removes

any ambiguity for the employee.

Liability waivers are also essential. Anyone who visits your property should complete a waiver of liability, whether they are riding or not. The possible exceptions would be your vet or other health professional or farrier. Other professionals generally have their own insurance. All children under 18

should have their waivers completed by a parent or legal guardian. Be sure to include emergency contact numbers on the waivers and file them neatly away. Again, consult an attorney if necessary to ensure comprehensive and legally enforceable verbiage.





time to properly evaluate the issued complaint and formulate your best response to remedy the situation.

### Fix It

Be honest and transparent when you address the complaint. If you failed to do something then admit it and fix it. If the complaint is erroneous then explain your position. Do not be drawn into long-winded explanations and do not conduct the conversation in front of others. Privacy is important for all concerned. With your written contract in hand, you can point out any discrepancies or misunderstandings that have occurred.

In the event that your “upset party” will not let the matter go and seeks legal advice, then you must do the same. Bear in mind that as a company (L.L.P., L.L.C., or Corporation) you cannot defend yourself in court in most states and thus must employ counsel. At times you may wish to consult an attorney and request a letter sent on your behalf outlining your position. This can sometimes eradicate any further issues and is a powerful deterrent in some situations.

### Don't Escalate

It is only human that we feel the need to explain ourselves to others, especially if we are wrongfully accused of doing something. The quickest way to envelope yourself in an unprofessional bog is to take to social media to defend yourself. If your “upset party” has used the social media channels to accuse you of some misdemeanor, it is very hard to ignore it but ignore it you must! If messages appear on your page/wall then simply delete them. If posts appear in groups or other pages you can ask the company to remove them on your behalf.

### Do Not Be Petty

It is easy to be drawn into petty disputes, especially if you overhear bad gossip about yourself or your horses or students. Do not be prey to the whims of others. Always act as a professional and stay above the barn gossip or nonsense spoken at the rail at the horse show. It is hard to take criticism but if it is constructive then you can use it to improve yourself. Negative input from others can do you no harm unless you choose to allow it to do so, so be confident in your own abilities and conduct yourself with integrity at all times. If you don't engage, then hurtful comments and divisive conversation will have no effect.

In conclusion, conducting your business successfully will always depend on your integrity and a good measure of common sense. You want to keep your clients happy and your reputation stellar. All horse people are busy and it is all too easy to ignore the paperwork side of the business. By keeping good records and contracts, and filing them diligently away for future use, you will protect your bottom line and your reputation. Although lawsuits can and do happen regardless of a contract being executed, you will provide your counsel with good ammunition to protect you in a court of law with a well-written contract. Do not be shy to contact an attorney; many offer quite reasonable rates to review or create these documents. ■

About the author:

**Nikki Alvin-Smith** is an international Grand Prix dressage trainer/clinician who has competed in Europe at the Grand Prix level earning scores of over 72%. Together with her husband Paul, who is also a Grand Prix rider, they operate a private horse breeding/training farm in Stamford, NY.

➤ *Dollars and Sense continued*  
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solicitation of clients at your barn, terms of insurance and liability coverage.

### Insurance and Liability

Many insurance companies charge more for facilities that offer riding disciplines that are considered more dangerous; for example, jumping as opposed to dressage. They also charge more if you offer group lessons as opposed to one-on-one lessons. Your insurance should allow outside trainers to come in and work, and when asking an outside trainer to develop a new client base at your farm you should be named on their own training liability insurance policy. Seek professional help from an experienced insurance agent before making a commitment to expanding your business.

What if you have zero interest in a multi-discipline option at your farm and wish to focus on one discipline only?

If you are a specialist in a discipline and ride and train at an advanced level this is a good idea. You are well versed and hopefully well respected in your discipline of choice and can attract students who wish to work their way to the top of the sport. Your business branding will be clear-cut and your time will be spent doing the discipline that you love the most.

Always try to follow your passion and be honest with yourself about how you like to spend your time. Energy, enthusiasm, and knowledge can edge that bottom line into positive territory, whatever decision you make with regard to whether or not to specialize. Dollars are important but use your common sense when making this decision. ■

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# Dollars and Sense—To Specialize or Not to Specialize

By Nikki Alvin-Smith

**A**S THE SAYING GOES, the way to make a small fortune in the horse business is to begin with a large one. This is no joke. In the management of your horse business it is wise to consider all the options available for improvement of the bottom line. One of these is whether you should specialize in one riding discipline or offer a variety to your boarders and students. There are advantages to providing a larger menu of riding options to attract a variety of horse enthusiasts. Here are a few tips based on my experience working with trainers as a clinician/advisor.

## Can Your Facility Manage a Multi-Discipline Approach?

Obviously, different disciplines require different facilities; for example, a dressage arena will have completely different footing than a barrel-racing arena. Show jumping and cross-country will need much larger arenas and outside space to operate at a professional level. An indoor arena used for jumping needs to have sufficient height above fences for rider and horse to safely avoid hitting rafters or trusses.

Every dressage rider looks at a large arena space free of obstacles with delight. Every hunter/jumper looks at a large arena space that is free of obstacles with a “hmm.” If you take on both disciplines, carrying jumps back and forth can be tedious. Ideally you have two arenas, but this is often not practical.

Western riders may like to practice their barrel racing speeds in and out of the arena, charging about at a gallop while the dressage rider will be aghast at the interruption in their schooling session by such



Carriage driving will require groomed tracks and large spaces for training. Photo courtesy Nikki Alvin-Smith.

commotion. Of course for eventers, three disciplines are already in the pot!

Carriage driving will require groomed tracks and large spaces for training.

Look at your facility with a keen professional eye and be honest about your budget. Facility development is expensive.

## Cost of Additional Hardware

If you are working with those riders who love to jump you'll need to budget for the purchase of the lumber, poles, and standards. Allow funds for regular maintenance of the jumps for re-painting and associated labor costs. Similarly the dressage brigade will appreciate mirrors, the barrel racers will need barrels, etc.

For driving you will also need to invest in different equipment for transportation of carriages/driving equipment if you are taking clients to shows.

## Cost of Additional Lesson Horses

Although many horses can work across disciplines, there are different skill sets required for a horse to be useful in his partnership with you in training everyone from the neophyte to the advanced rider. The lesson horses will need to be kept tuned up to their job. As we all know, that most

valuable asset, the good lesson horse, is not easy to find, so be happy if you can locate the horses you need to expand your business into other disciplines.

You will also need to invest in different tack such as saddles and bridles. Don't forget to include all the details in your budget plans.

## Your Training Skills

If you are not cognizant of the details of the different riding disciplines, you should certainly further your education in those departments before offering your training services. This may require a new horse for you, certification costs, competition experience, and associated costs such as memberships in the USHJA, USDF, etc.

## Employment/Partnerships

If you don't have time or inclination to learn a new discipline, you could look for another trainer to come to your facility and offer the services. Collaboration with other trainers can be very beneficial. It is wise to set the terms out in writing before you start working together. Agree on fees, to which trainer does the client “belong,” rules of termination of the agreement, rules of

➤ *continued on page 27*



Photo by Craig McClure.  
Image courtesy of the city of Virginia Beach.



## A Moment

By Ric Sutton

**I**T WAS HOT. IT WAS MUGGY. That's what Virginia Beach is like in August. We had finished our dinner break about an hour ago and made another pass up the boardwalk and then down the strip. There had been little breeze on the boardwalk and even less in the canyon of Atlantic Avenue created by the hotels and buildings on either side of the four-lane street. Our progress in both directions had been interrupted several times as usual by tourists and locals asking the same questions: "Can I pet/photograph your horses? Why are you riding horses? When did we start using horses?" These repeat encounters are a pretty significant part of the job for a mounted police officer in a resort town.

Although they take on a sense of sameness they never got old for me. It's refreshing to have a pleasant conversation with folks who are happy to see a cop.

My riding partner and I shared a look as we approached the bar district and wordlessly agreed to post up in "the Block," where most of the oceanfront bars are set hip to shoulder in a single block of Atlantic Avenue. With practiced ease we both applied a little right leg behind the girth and our horses slipped into a coordinated turn on the fore and came to a stop at the same distance apart that we ride. Hours of patrolling together and training in the arena provided our horses with the knowledge of exactly what we wanted and

expected of them. Both horses faced the undulating mass of revelers across the four lanes and sidewalk and came to a halt that would not have scored well at X in a dressage test but certainly served our purpose. We and our mounts took a breath of the thick air and settled in for the show.

Just three months ago my mount, Mo, had been very nervous, extremely forward, and quick to startle. Most patrols involved me half halting, circling, and working to stay in the saddle. He had come to us with very little education and was unsure about most everything, but over the summer he and I had come to understand each other. I recognized what it took to teach him something and how to gain his trust. He learned that I would protect him but not tolerate tantrums. Our agreement became that if he would stand quietly regardless of the issue, I would give him a break as soon as possible and probably a Twizzler if he had been extremely brave.

My reverie was broken by the siren, lights, and horns of a firetruck screaming toward us. Mo looked up and pricked his ears. "No biggie" I thought as it drew closer. Just then a marching brass band came off of the boardwalk and down the sidewalk toward us. Mo shifted his attention and took a big breath and I felt his body tense. He was not a fan of brass bands. I sunk my heels and patted his withers. The band stopped half a block from us to entertain a crowd.

"Fight!" I heard my partner say, and turned to see a large crowd swinging, yelling, and jumping on the sidewalk across from us. We trotted across the street while shouting to the crowd to "Move!" and "Get back!" Both horses surged into the flailing mass of people and then split up to drive people away and clear the sidewalk. Ground officers rushed in and tackled the two men fighting. Mo and I worked back and forth along the sidewalk, pushing the crowd back and creating a safe space for the ground officers. People yelled and waved their hands in Mo's face, but they gave ground and moved back when 1400 pounds ➤

and 16.3 hands of bay warmblood moved toward them. After about 10 minutes, the arrestees were taken to jail and the crowd resumed its normal level of activity. We walked back across the street and posted up. The firetruck had passed, the brass band moved on, and the fight was over.

Mo happily took his Twizzler and let out a snort before relaxing and standing with one foot up. In that shared moment I knew that he was going to be a good police horse. He would go on to prove me right several more times. ■

*Have a good ride,  
Ric*

#### About the author:

**Officer Ric Sutton** is a twenty-seven year veteran police officer in Virginia Beach, Virginia. His assignments have covered a wide span of the law enforcement spectrum. He has most recently been assigned to the Mounted Patrol, and is the director of the East Coast Mounted Patrol Association.



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Photo courtesy of Staff Sergeant Bruno Gonzalez Aranda and Private Guillermo Puche Aranda

#### ► Teachers continued from page 21

Bruno's difficult job was in the starting of not only young, unhandled horses but also new riders who had no previous training, and getting them up to the standard of the unit for patrol and parade work usually within a year. Both horses and riders were brought on together—no easy task by any means. Training sessions are undertaken in a variety of areas in the military's large facility: in the arena, out on the surrounding trails, and in the *esplanade*, a large, circuit-like area out in the fields. Bruno commented that he liked having a variety of training areas because he felt that it was "good for the horses and good for the riders." He said that he believes that not only should "the horses be developed to be all-rounders but so too should the riders," values that he has learned from two important teachers in his life.

I asked what they each consider to be their most rewarding moments in the Royal Guards. Bruno highlighted his pride of achievement in training a group of young horses and inexperienced men and bringing them all up to parade standard. He was respected for showing such good results and for his unwillingness to leave any horse behind, even the most difficult animals. Seeing them come through their problems and become useful members of the program and not write-offs gave him a great deal of job fulfillment. Guillermo said that as a true animal lover, having the opportunity to spend six hours or more daily with his mount meant that he was able to develop a huge bond with him, this bond being deeper than any he has ever had with another animal in his life. They both men-

Staff Sergeant Bruno Gonzalez Aranda and Private Guillermo Puche Aranda riding in the musical "Carousel" (drill), at the Plaza de Toros, Antequera, Spain, 2016.

tioned how much they enjoyed the adventure and freedom of mounted patrol duties in the forest. Of course, one of the constant challenges both riders faced was the important job of presenting those gray Lancer horses gleamingly clean, a chore that added at least an extra hour of preparation time for their public appearances.

After nine years with the unit, during the writing of this article, Bruno officially signed off from the military to continue university studies. He also recently obtained his national Technical Sport Level 1 riding teacher certificate. Guillermo, having sustained an injury, has had to leave the mounted unit but still continues in the Royal Guards, though non-mounted. He is enrolled in the military academy and as a lifelong musician, is a member of the Military Band. As for me, I do not care one bit if "pride" is one of the Seven Deadly Sins, because an enormous sense of pride is what I feel for the achievements of these two special young men.

On a side note: So what happened to their beloved mounts?

On April 2nd their horses were auctioned off as no longer viable for the unit. Both Cela and Celamin are now where they need to be: in the hands of their new owners, Bruno and Guillermo, who both placed winning bids on their mounts!

No horse left behind. ■

#### About the author:

**Didi Arias** is a Level 3 ARIA Certified Instructor and national dressage judge and teacher, who resides in Almeria, Spain.



# Equine Health Maintenance Programs at the Boarding Stable—What’s Best?

By Julie I. Fershtman, Attorney at Law



**T**EENAGERS, WHEN THEY LEARN TO DRIVE, are sometimes cautioned that they’re actually driving *five* cars at once—cars in front of them, behind them, and on either side, in addition to the car in which they’re seated—and must watch *all* of the cars to protect their safety. In a roughly comparable way, those who board their horses at other peoples’ stables have every incentive to be watchful of *the other horses* on the property. Knowing that all horses are current on their de-wormings and vaccinations can be just as important as making sure that your own horse stays on schedule. All it takes is one horse with a contagious illness, such as strangles, to cause disastrous problems throughout the whole barn.

Should boarding stables impose equine health requirements for all horses on the property? Should horse owners demand this? This article discusses a few options as well as problems to consider. Which one is best? You decide.

## Option: Stable Handles All Vaccination and De-Worming Arrangements

In one arrangement, boarding stable management schedules all vaccinations, de-wormings, and sometimes even farrier attention for each boarded horse. The stable’s preferred veterinarian vaccinates all horses (for tetanus, rabies, EEE/WEE, and West Nile, for example) during the same visit, and horse owners are billed afterward. These arrangements are more common with training stables as trainers develop their own individualized “program” based on their preferences and experience.

## Option: Stable’s Preferred Veterinarian Recommends Schedule, and Owners Handle Arrangements on Their Own

In other arrangements, the stable’s preferred veterinarian posts a recommended list and schedule for de-wormings and vaccinations. Afterwards, boarders must make their own arrangements within the timeline provided. To ensure the owners’ compliance, stable management might request proof such as receipts for products purchased or veterinary arrangements the owner made.

## Option: Owners Determine What’s Best and Make Own Arrangements

Some stables allow boarders total discretion to make decisions on when, how, (or even if) to vaccinate and de-worm their horses.

## Some Cautions

Depending on how stable health programs are administered, problems can occur. For example:

- **Insured horses.** Some equine insurance policies require that only a licensed veterinarian or qualified person under veterinary supervision administer injections to the covered horse. Consequently, if the boarding stable owner or manager (who is not a veterinarian) injects a boarded horse without sufficient veterinary oversight, coverage could potentially be denied if complications develop from those injections.
- **Billing issues.** When stables arrange veterinary and farrier attention, some pass along the actual invoices so that boarders can pay each professional directly, with shared farm call charges. Other stables pay the professionals first, then bill their boarders for reimbursement. Over the years, some stables and equine professionals have been known to impose surcharges on each bill for routine veterinary attention (surcharges that may or may not be disclosed to their customers). Boarding contracts can address the issue and specify how the boarder will be billed.

## Conclusion

All parties to horse boarding arrangements can benefit greatly from contracts that explain how equine health maintenance will be handled. If these issues are important to you, insist on getting it in writing. Plan ahead and protect yourself. ■

*This article does not constitute legal advice. When questions arise based on specific situations, direct them to a knowledgeable attorney.*

### About the author:

**Julie Fershtman** is one of the nation’s most experienced Equine Law practitioners. A lawyer for nearly 32 years, she is a Shareholder with Foster Swift Collins & Smith, PC, in Michigan. She has successfully handled equine cases in 18 jurisdictions nationwide and has tried equine cases before juries in four states. She has drafted thousands of equine industry contracts, is listed in The Best Lawyers in America, and is the recipient of the ABA’s 2017 “Excellence in the Advancement of Animal Law Award.” Her speaking engagements span 29 states. For more information, please visit [www.equinelaw.net](http://www.equinelaw.net) and [www.fosterswift.com](http://www.fosterswift.com).

# The One Thing Nobody Tells You When You Decide to Start Your Business— You're Going to Lose Money

By Doug Emerson, *The Profitable Horseman*

**A**NYONE WHO HAS STARTED A BUSINESS knows the excitement and satisfaction of being your own boss. No more orders to take from superiors, total control of how you spend your time, and best of all, the freedom to keep the money your business earns by your hard work!

I felt those exciting feelings when I started working for myself, and also enjoyed a feeling of self-confidence that things could only go right. After all, I was the boss now.

Here is a short story about the one thing people don't tell you when you start your business.

My mentor, Mike, was an experienced business owner for over 40 years when I first met him. Born in Denmark, he immigrated to the United States with knowledge of the world and how it worked. He'd served in the North Atlantic during World War II on a patrol torpedo (PT) boat. As a result, he was disciplined and had learned to control fear. Tough but fair is an accurate description of his demeanor.

We were having a conversation about business when he spoke a disturbing sentence to me. "Doug, someday, no matter how careful and diligent you are in your dealings, you're going to lose money. You see, all business transactions involve an element of risk for you to earn money. And eventually, risk catches up to you and that means you'll provide goods or services in good faith and not get paid. When, not if, it happens, acknowledge the loss and keep moving forward."

Those two words, *lose money*, were chilling to hear. I chose to bury Mike's gloomy message deep in my subconscious, convinced if I didn't think about it, it would go away.

Eventually, as predicted, I lost money on a business deal. Mike's wise words replayed in my head immediately. That "someday" had arrived and I sure didn't like the feel of it. How could I have been so blind, so trusting, and so stupid as not to see it coming? If Mike had not told me earlier that losing money was part of playing the game of business, my agony would have endured much longer than it did.

Heeding his advice, I acknowledged the loss, analyzed why it happened, and then moved on. Since then, I've lost money from time to time in a variety of businesses including the horse business. Mike's philosophy has helped greatly and I smile now as I vividly remember our candid conversation long ago.

Because you are a business person operating as a professional horseman, you too will have or already have had customers who don't pay you in your businesses of boarding, lessons, training, and horse sales. You will lose money. You will buy horses for resale and not be able to recover the maintenance expense, training time, and market-



ing effort you put into the project. You will lose money. You will lose money when you buy equipment, vehicles, and saddles that don't perform as you hoped. You will also lose when you hire people who turn out to be total duds as workers.

Here are ways to minimize your losses when they occur:

- Boarders who get behind more than a month usually will never get caught up and remain habitually delinquent. Give them legal notice that you are evicting them for non-payment. If necessary, settle for a lesser amount of the past due board for cash payment for them moving their horse out immediately. It's best to get some of the money you are owed and their horses out of your barn so you can find a paying customer to replace the income. If you are "nice," chances are excellent the boarder will soon be six months behind and you'll have a lien on a boarded horse of low value that needs a farrier and veterinary care and will be difficult to sell within the requirements of state laws. Your boarders will respond to "tough but fair" policies much better than "nice and lenient."
- Collect training fees in advance for customers you have no experience with. It's a reasonable expectation.
- Collect lesson fees in advance with package lesson programs. Your income will be more predictable and your students won't have to worry about paying every time they have a lesson.
- If a "pay as you go" lesson model is better



for you, insist payment is due the day of the lesson, not next time. Next time may be never. Continuous accommodations for forgetful students who don't show up or need to cancel or change lesson times frequently should be avoided. Remember as an instructor, all you have to sell is your time. A canceled scheduled lesson or a no-show student robs you of non-recoverable income dedicated to that time slot.

- For purchases of equipment, vehicles, and tack, a bargain price is never a rationale for accepting inferior quality. Experience shouts it's better to pay a little more for quality than to pay twice for inferior products.
- You'll know at the end of your new employee's first week on the job if you've hired a keeper. All too often, employers think they can fix and train an unskilled employee. You can't afford to find out. Let the employee go immediately to find more suitable work. You'll be doing yourself and the employee a huge favor. Prolonging the inevitable dismissal results in a huge monetary loss in many ways.

To sum up:


- 1 Accept the certain truth—you're going to lose some money along the path of success.
- 2 Cut your losses by resolving problems quickly. Procrastination never helps.
- 3 Don't wallow in self-pity because of your financial loss. Learn from the mistake and get out there and sell something—lessons, boarding, training, or a horse.

You can't go back in time and you can't go forward into the future. Your choice is simple. Do your best work today and your business will continue to improve. ■

About the author:

**Doug Emerson**, the Profitable Horseman, consults, writes, and speaks about the business half of the horse business. Visit [www.ProfitableHorseman.com](http://www.ProfitableHorseman.com).

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... in which Cameo Miller stirs her thoughts and ideas to see what rises to the top.



## Baby Steps

By Cameo Miller

Illustration by Bethany Caskey

**I**F YOU READ THIS COLUMN AT ALL, you know that I try to give ideas and options to make changes that can make things better or easier for you. You also know that I recognize that you are **very** busy and already overloaded with all that you do every minute of every day. But you and I both know that if you do what you've always done, you will get what you've always gotten—nothing will change if you don't change it. If you are one of the fortunate few whose life is exactly the way you want it to be, then I salute you. Keep doing what you have been doing because you have it exactly right. Here are some tips for the rest of us.

First, you must know what it is you want to change. What is not right and what needs to change for it to be right? This can be anything—your equipment, a problem with one of your horses, your own weight/strength/flexibility, difficulty with one of your students or the student's family, the way you do paperwork, problems with staff or your own family—**anything** you want to change for the better. (For more ideas, reread my last two columns: "The Bottom

Line," and "Write Your Story"). There may be many things you want to change, but pick just one. For that one, define clearly what you think is wrong about it, how you want it to change, and what it would look like if it were "right."

There are probably many things you defined as needing to be different to fix this one problem, and a progression of changes. Just pick *one* of the beginning things. For example: there are several issues with your fencing, but the one thing you picked is the electric fence in the back pasture is not working. *One* thing you need to check is weed growth under it, so take your string trimmer and go out tomorrow and walk that fence line. You probably want to take the fence tester with you, but don't add too many "while I'm out there I might as well..." or it will get to be such a big job it might get put off. Make it a top priority to get that one thing done tomorrow. You may see the source of your fence problem while you are out there, and, if not, you can do the next thing on the fix-it list the next day. Soon it will be taken care of and checked off your to-do list. Build on this and, before you know it, all of the fencing problems will be resolved and off your mind.

We can become overwhelmed by the multitude of things that need doing and the burdened feeling that we get more things loaded on than ever get fully accomplished. This is especially true because so many things we do really **are** never ending—the horses need feeding and watering over and over and over again, the stalls need cleaning over and over, the tack needs to be cleaned, the house needs to be cleaned, there are meals to cook and clothes to wash, and, and, and.... So put all of this into perspective. We have chosen a career in which animals and students depend on us to be there on a contin-

We can become overwhelmed by the multitude of things that need doing and the burdened feeling that we get more things loaded on than ever get fully accomplished.

ual basis. All of the repetitive things have a schedule that you follow—does the schedule need adjusting? Are some of the things on the schedule part of the problem? Do you need to trade lesson time for a student cleaning your house, the stalls, the tack? Can you afford to hire some of it done on a routine basis? Do you need to hire someone to fix one part of the problem? Can you trade something else—for example, do you have a plot of land you're not using that someone in the city might like to plant a garden on in trade for...? Pick one issue, pick one of the beginning solutions, get it done and checked off. Over time, many of the burdensome and stressful problems will be resolved, leaving you feeling lighter and freer.

Changing the way you do anything has a ripple effect. You just need to channel those ripples into ways that will make your life better and easier. Making baby-step choices that get you headed in the right direction has two positive effects—1) those seemingly insurmountable tasks are taken care of and no longer weighing you down, and 2) learning to make better choices (even tiny ones) improves your skill in choice making. You have to learn to make the best choices for you that send the ripples in the best directions. And you have to learn to keep making these better choices all the time and not fall back into old habits that left you burdened and stressed. Just tweaking a few things can make a big difference over time—you've seen that with your horses and your student lesson plans as well as other areas of your business and life. Decide on your best baby steps, start making them, and let them add up into a more positive future. ■

#### About the author:

**Cameo Miller** is a Masters-level clinical psychologist and a Level IV ARIA Certified Instructor based in Michigan. She is a member of the ARIA Evaluation Panel and National Riding Instructors Convention Staff.





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