

Sterling Hunter/Jumpers What and How We Teach

“For the young, the practice of equitation (horseback riding) is a valuable lessons, as it requires the exercise of all human virtue. If they are introduced to the practice of riding by understanding and patient teachers, then they too will develop these traits. The young rider grows to realize the horse is a partner rather than a slave, who also deserves love and understanding.”

Our goals for you, the student:

EDUCATION! There is no end to learning in the world of the horse. Science keeps changing in the horse care industry and a rider’s skill is always and forever developing. With this in mind our dedication is to the learning process. We want each student to enjoy learning about ‘horsemanship,’ starting from the basics of proper horse management to finding balance and harmony while riding. I feel what makes us different is that we accept the learning process and understand that each student will develop at their own pace. It isn’t show ring achievements or prizes that we strive for. We know we are doing a good job when the student has a desire to continue learning with enthusiasm.

SAFETY! Horses are flight animals. When confronted with danger, either real or perceived they will run! We cannot train the instincts completely out of a horse. Some horses are more in touch with their instincts than others. We also cannot teach one horse to be another horse. And we certainly can’t teach a horse not to be a horse. Horses will shy. Horses will buck. Horses will shake. Horses will stumble. (Please read “The Nature of the Horse” file for more info.) Too often, instructors will only focus on riding goals and forget to emphasize horsemanship safety. It seems to me that for riding to be correct, it should be safe – that safe riding is correct riding – and that philosophy should be the foundation for quality riding instruction. Building on this philosophy I employ ideas and safety procedures developed by the American Association for Horsemanship Safety with all of my students. We will spend time out of the saddle that is just as important, if not more important than the time in the saddle. Also, on days that the weather does not permit riding in the arena I will hold barn lessons where the student will receive in depth instruction on various horsemanship topics. Additionally, I teach all beginners the “Secure Seat” method (for more info. Please read “Introduction to the Secure Seat”). The Secure Seat is a means to a deep, balanced seat on a horse that results in a rider who is less likely to fall. I use many different exercises to develop balance and feel, but most importantly to develop confidence.

HOW WE ACHIEVE THESE GOALS:

*Students are started at the walk. During this time most of the riding will be done while the horse is on the lunge line under the trainers’ control. This allows the rider to devote all of his/her attention towards learning to sit properly so that she may work with the horse, not against him. It proves a ‘faster route’ to learning proper riding techniques. Also, shorter times of exercise and frequent breaks, keep the rider from getting physically

and mentally tired. In the long run, this spares my schooling horses (or any horse) from carrying an 'unbalanced' and stiff new rider for extended periods of time in hard work which could not only cause him undue discomfort and strain, but potentially ruin his good nature. During the lunge lessons, students will be asked to do exercises building towards the Balanced Seat such as; stretching the arms to the horses ears, bending over and touching his/her toes, stretching to touch the horses tail, etc. Riders also work extensively in the 2-point, or 'jumping' position which increases balance and leg strength. As 'crazy' as this all sounds, these exercises help develop balance and an increased sense of security. The rider learns to ride independently of the hands (no depending on the reins for balance and control) and legs (no gripping). Off the lunge line, the rider is given some freedom to practice what has been learned on the lunge line. The rider is also allowed to practice steering and basic control of the horse. Several fun games are utilized in teaching these skills.

*As the student progresses, we begin work at the trot. Again, the exercises are done at the trot on the lunge line. A new skill called posting (or rising to the trot) is taught. This enables the rider to more gracefully (and less painfully) follow the bounce of the horse's trot. Posting involves some strength, but mostly a sense of rhythm, timing and balance. As the rider becomes more supple and coordinated, periods of sitting trot can begin. Also, students will continue to improve their 2-point at the trot. Soon the student will be able to work off the lunge line but in the safe confines of the round pen to practice steering and control at the walk and trot. Once the student is comfortable and capable, we will go back to the arena to work. Students will start working on skills such as trotting over ground poles and transitions back and forth between the walk, trot and halt.

*Students are introduced to the canter only after they can show control at the walk and trot. Again students will return to the lunge line until they are comfortable with the canter, then practice the canter in the round pen, and then in the arena. We will work more extensively over cavaletti (ground poles) which are used to give the student a better feel and knowledge of the horses stride in relation to timing, rhythm and ground coverage in distance and prepares the student to learn how to jump. In this system I believe most riders can learn to jump over small and simple obstacles of about 2 foot in height. I have personally found that when the time is spent really developing a riders seat and the ability to adjust his balance, that jumping comes as no bigger risk than simply RIDING. In my own observation of the advancing student, jumping (with the proper foundation of skills) actually sharpens a riders balance and skills and gives them the edge to ride out a horse should they shy, bolt, buck, or stumble. There is no way to teach a rider to actually ride out a horse that acts up as mentioned, but the action of the rider who learns to adjust their center of gravity over simple jumps develops the un-teachable ability to ride through a buck or shy.

Each and every student is treated as an individual and will progress at their own pace. Some skills will be learned quickly and others will take more time. No rider will ever be made to feel like they aren't just as important or capable as another rider. Furthermore, no instructor will ask a student to do anything that the student is not yet skilled enough to accomplish or that the student does not feel confident in doing. It is our biggest hope that every experience be positive and that most experiences be fun!!