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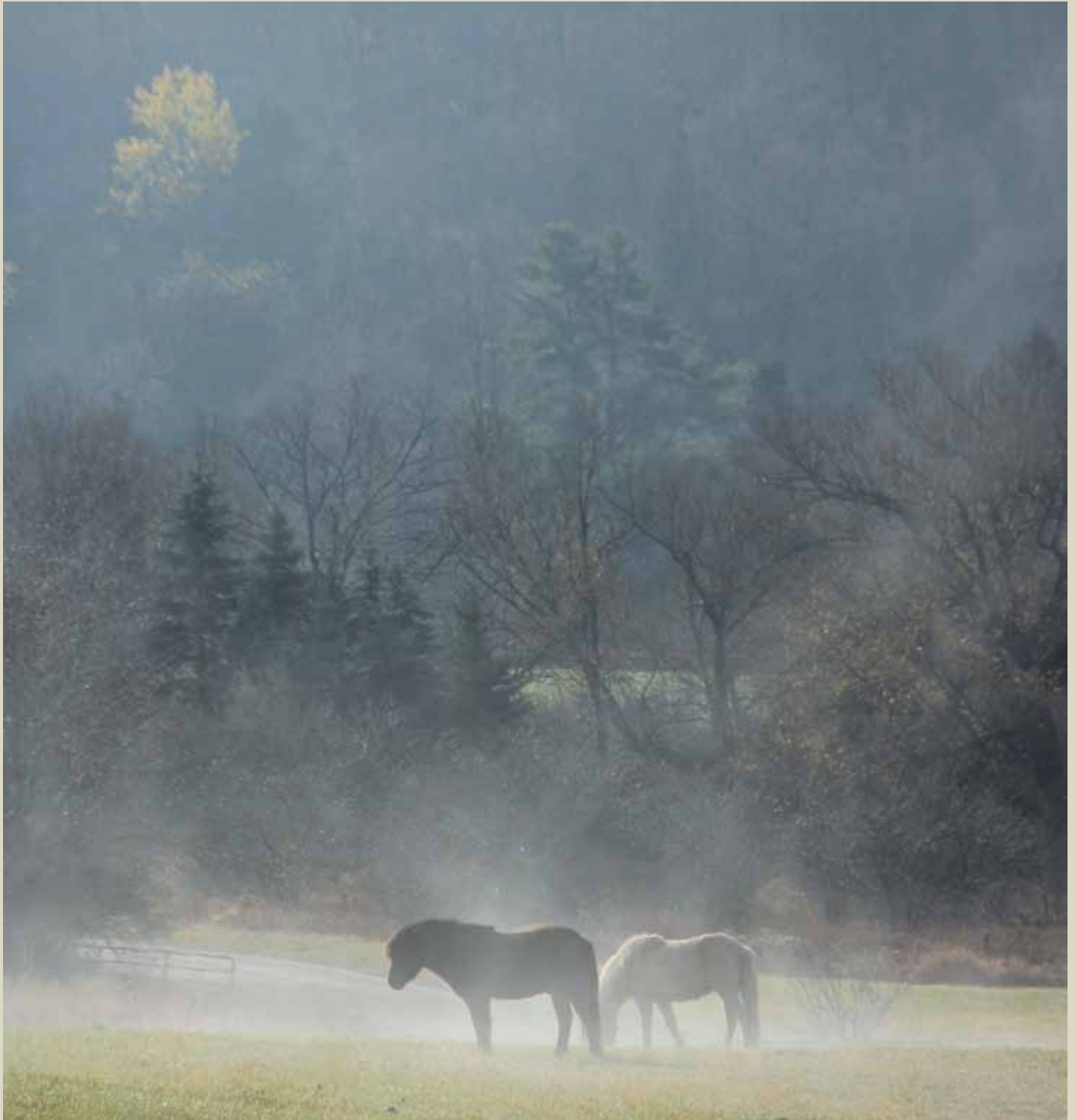
ISSUE TWO

THE

2015

# ICELANDIC HORSE

Q U A R T E R L Y



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**Official Publication of the United States Icelandic Horse Congress**  
Member Association of FEIF (International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations)

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## NEIHC 2015 Events!



March 7: Annual meeting and Þorrablót party in Claverack, NY  
June: Games Day

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Sept. 18-20: Tolt in Harmony clinic with Trausti at Thor Icelandics



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# THE USIHC MISSION

- Support the use and health of the Icelandic horse according to international standards
- Advance the study, breeding, and exhibition of the Icelandic horse
- Represent FEIF in the United States and represent the United States to FEIF
- Maintain a registry of purebred Icelandic horses

*The U.S. Icelandic Horse Congress is a member of FEIF ([www.feif.org](http://www.feif.org)), the International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations, representing the national Icelandic horse associations of 19 countries. FEIF governs competition activities and regulates the breeding and registration of Icelandic horses throughout the world outside of Iceland.*

*The USIHC was formed in 1987 by representatives of the U.S. Icelandic Horse Federation and the International Icelandic Horse Association to meet the FEIF rule that only one association from each country is allowed to represent the breed.*

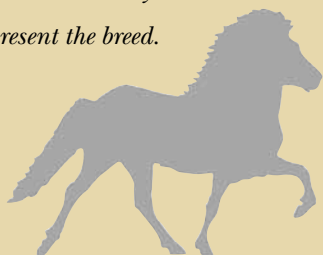


Photo by Andrea Barber

## W H Y J O I N T H E U S I H C ?

### LEARN

As the owner or rider of an Icelandic horse, you chose a very special breed with its own culture and history. It is important to learn about the breed's unique traits, capabilities, and needs, so that you and your Icelandic horse will have a happy relationship and it will live a healthy and long life in a country far from its origin. As a USIHC member, you have a wealth of information at your fingertips and a personal connection to the best experts in the country.

You receive *The Icelandic Horse Quarterly*, a 52-page all-color magazine, four times a year. All issues since 2008 are available online.

You have free access to WorldFengur, the worldwide database of all registered Icelandic horses. About 400,000 horses, alive and deceased, are included, with pedigrees, offspring, ownership, and evaluation and competition results. Some horses even have photos and videos. WorldFengur is an invaluable tool for all Icelandic horse breeders and very interesting for the rest of us. Go to "Search Horses" on the USIHC website and find

any US-registered Icelandic horse by its number, name, or farm name to link to WorldFengur.

You can take part in—and even help create—educational seminars and teaching programs. For example, the USIHC Education committee developed and now administers the Riding Badge Program for pleasure and competition riders of all ages. On the USIHC website you can find links to FEIF-certified trainers who are USIHC members and can help you get the best out of your Icelandic horse. In 2014, the Education committee began offering yearly Sport Judges Seminars for those wanting to learn to judge competitions.

The USIHC also has a scholarship fund for members who complete their certification to become national or international judges.

### CONNECT

Icelandic horses are social animals, and so are their people. The USIHC is the umbrella organization of regional clubs all over the U.S.: There are currently 12 active clubs. Find the regional Icelandic riding club in your area through the



USIHC website, so that you and your horse can ride with friends. USIHC Youth members can apply to participate in the American Youth Cup or the international FEIF Youth Cup or Youth Camp. These are great events designed to bring young riders together for a week of fun, learning, and competition.

Through the USIHC website, you can sign up for RSS feeds for the Events Calendar or web updates. You can check the membership list to see if your friends are members and when your own membership expires. And you can stay connected through the USIHC Facebook page.

## COMPETE

The Icelandic horse has international competition rules: You can compete in the same classes and under the same rules in any of the 19 FEIF member countries and compare your progress with competition riders from around the world.

The USIHC Competition committee adapts these international FEIF rules for American venues and special circumstances, publishing a new set of USIHC Competition Rules each year. These are available on the USIHC website, along with all the tools needed to put on a sanctioned show, such as entry forms, judging forms, judges' cards, and announcers' cards. (These tools are also useful for organizing fun shows and schooling shows.) Also on the website are lists of prohibited tack and equipment and other necessary information for competition riders.

Sanctioned shows are eligible for funding under the Flagship Event Funding Program. Sanctioned-show organizers have access to the IceTest software to record show scores so that they immediately appear in the U.S. National Ranking; qualified shows can also send scores to the FEIF World Ranking list. Scores are posted on the USIHC website for everyone to see and compare.

Only USIHC members can join the U.S. team at the Icelandic Horse World Championships, held in a FEIF country every other year. If you hope to compete at an international level, see the team recommendations and requirements on the USIHC website. Tryouts for the team are open and are National Ranking events: Anyone can ride for scores and to get feedback from an international judge, whether or not you intend to compete in the World Championships.

## PROMOTE

USIHC members promote the Icelandic horse at many equine expositions around the country. The USIHC provides a beautiful display, brochures, and copies of the *Quarterly*, and will contribute to the cost of the booth and stall space if certain requirements are met.

The new USIHC Breed Ambassador program rewards members who take their Icelandic horses to all-breed events and shows.

Trainers, breeding farms, and trekking barns can promote their services through the USIHC Farm List in the *Quarterly* and on the website. Stallion owners can promote their stud services through the online USIHC Stallion Book.

## REGISTER

Whether you plan to breed one mare or have a breeding farm, the USIHC Registry and the Breeding committee provide information and services to help you. The Icelandic horse is one of few breeds with international evaluation standards, so that breeding horses from all over the world are judged on the same 10 points of conformation and 10 points of ridden abilities, and all scores are entered into the WorldFengur database. That allows you to compare the quality of your breeding stock with Icelandic horses around the world, both past and present.

USIHC-sanctioned breeding evaluation shows for registered adult horses ages four and up are scheduled by USIHC Regional Clubs and private farms. Breeding shows are eligible for funding under the Flagship Event Funding Program. All rules and regulations are supplied by the Breeding committee from the international FEIF rules and are available on the USIHC website. Regional Clubs and private farms can also organize Young Horse Assessments for foals to three-year-olds. Beginning in 2015, these assessments also qualify for USIHC funding; contact the Breeding Leader.

In accordance with FEIF rules, the USIHC has adopted stringent tests before a foal can be registered as a purebred

Icelandic horse. You can be sure of the parentage of any registered Icelandic horse and know that your registered foals have proof of their value.

You don't have to be a USIHC member to register your Icelandic horse, but by becoming a member you help support this vital USIHC program.

## INNOVATE

The USIHC is a member-driven organization. The more active and involved our members are, the stronger the USIHC becomes. Do you have an idea for a project or event that will support the Icelandic horse in America?

If so, write a proposal. USIHC members are eligible to receive a grant to fund creative projects that meet the USIHC's mission statement. Grant funding is included in the USIHC's annual budget—for 2015, \$8,000 is budgeted. Contact the USIHC president for more information or read about the grant program in Issue Three 2013 of the *Quarterly* on the website.

## JOIN US

There are only about 4,500 registered Icelandic horses in the U.S. and the USIHC, at about 500 members, is still a small "pioneer" organization compared to our counterparts in Iceland and Germany. Our committee members and board of directors are all volunteers. Please join us so that the USIHC can, as FEIF's mission states, "bring people together in their passion for the Icelandic horse"!

Yearly membership for an adult is \$45; youth memberships are \$35 or for a family (two adults, unlimited kids) it is \$65. Mail in the form in this magazine or join online at [www.icelandics.org/join](http://www.icelandics.org/join)

## QUESTIONS?

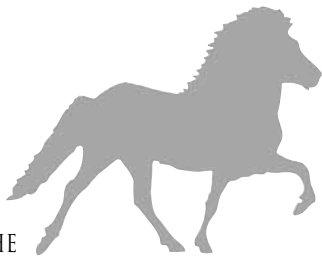
USIHC Board members and Committee chairs are here to answer them. For general questions, call or email our information desk or check the website.

Toll free: 866-929-0009  
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[www.icelandics.org](http://www.icelandics.org)

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FEIF'S MISSION: FEIF BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER  
IN THEIR PASSION FOR THE ICELANDIC HORSE

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# ICELANDIC HORSE

Q U A R T E R L Y

THE  
ICELANDIC  
HORSE  
QUARTERLY  
Issue Two 2015

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**On the cover:** Heleen Heyning  
captures a lovely, misty morning in  
the Catskill Mountains with this  
scene from her West Wind Farm in  
Delhi, NY. The horses are Kraftur frá  
Hrafnhólum and Björt frá Skiðbakka  
III. Heleen welcomes visitors; please  
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# COMMENTARY

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## WHY DOES MY MEMBERSHIP MATTER?

A review of the USIHC's membership between 2008 and 2014 reveals an interesting misconception. The widely held belief that we aren't recruiting new members is incorrect. The data shows the USIHC does a respectable job of generating new members each year. The reason we don't have 800 member households instead of 450 is a matter of retention not recruitment.

Further limited research reveals people don't stay with the USIHC for two broad reasons: "I don't have an Icelandic horse any more" and "I don't get enough of what I want for my money." The *Quarterly* contains an extensive list of the benefits of membership. (See pages 6-7.) There is, however, an altruistic aspect to membership that is nowhere on that list and is of great value to the Icelandic horse community in the United States. Membership dues allow the USIHC to exist and support your local Icelandic horse community regardless of your community's area of interest within the world of the Icelandic horse.

Most of what an individual "gets" comes from the local community. The point of the national organization is to support these local communities. Each individual membership in the USIHC helps keep the national organization running and enables local and regional support to promote the Icelandic horse, to educate people about the Icelandic horse, and to grow communities.

Further, your membership determines the amount of influence the United States wields in the global Icelandic horse community.

Understanding the international implications requires a little insight into our parent organization, the Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations (FEIF). The FEIF decision-making process is a two-step process taking at least two years. First the national representatives debate and decide an issue in the department meeting which takes place once per year. Once a department has come to a conclusion, the issue is presented as a proposal

to the Delegates Assembly the following year. This gives all the nations a chance to form an opinion and vote on all substantive changes before they come into effect. This system affords "small" member associations like the United States with a chance to vote on a topic at the Delegates Assembly that may have been decided in a department meeting to which the U.S. has not sent a representative. (In a typical year the United States only sends one or two representatives, while the bigger nations send up to 10 or more representatives.)

All the decisions made by the various FEIF departments (Breeding, Leisure Riding, Education, Sport, and Youth

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out the USIHC survey  
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survey](http://www.icelandics.org/survey)*

Work) are made by a majority vote of the representatives of the national member associations. Each member nation votes in proportion to the size of its membership. The "big" countries wield six votes each. The United States currently has two votes but is close to extending to three votes. More members translates directly into another vote.

Aside from a bit of altruism, the other key ingredient to making sure we have a national organization in place to support the local Icelandic horse communities is involvement. Members who participate in the Congress committee work, and perhaps, choose to do so at the FEIF level as well, connect their local communities to a much wider pool of expertise than will ever be found in one small part of the United States.

Here are some quick facts to keep in mind:

- FEIF is a federation of 19 member associations.

- None of the board members of FEIF are paid for any of their time.
- The FEIF Directors can work from 15 to 30 hours in a normal week. That number can jump to 60 hours immediately before and during the World Championships.
- None of the judges nor officials at the World Championships are paid.
- FEIF has only one paid staff member.
- None of the USIHC board members are paid.
- The USIHC only has one paid staff member.
- The USIHC board members not only donate their time, they also pay all their own travel costs.
- None of the funding provided by the USIHC benefits individuals. We only fund local communities.
- Your support of the USIHC costs less than two bales of hay in California (maybe three if you have a family membership). That may say something about the price of hay in California, but it is still a tiny fraction of what it costs to keep a horse.

*—Doug Smith, USIHC Board member and FEIF Director of Sport*



## 2015 ANNUAL MEETING

The USIHC held its annual meeting March 7 in Bloomington, MN at the Radisson Blu hotel attached to the Mall of America. Thanks go to Deb and Steve Cook and their son Nick for organizing the meeting. Some 40 members attended the all-day meeting, most from the Flugnir Regional Club, along with eight of the nine board directors: president Sara Lyter, vice president Lori Cretney, secretary Juli Cole, treasurer Kari Pietsch-Wangard, Andrea Barber, Will Covert, Katrin Sheehan, and Doug Smith. Many of the attendees also met for a dinner Friday night, organized by Nick Cook, and a reception hosted by the Flugnir Club on Saturday night.

Highlights included talks by FEIF international breeding judge Barbara Frische, competitive trail riders Eve and Dave Loftness, and equine dentist Lauren Taubes Keener, as well as a productive brainstorming session on how to recruit—and retain—members led by Doug Smith. At the afternoon Awards Ceremony, a special Sleipnir Award was given to USIHC member Dawn Shaw (in absentia) for tirelessly working to get Icelandic horses rescued and registered. See articles on many of these topics in this issue of the *Quarterly*; news on the awards presented at the meeting and the committee and directors' reports follow:

## NATIONAL RANKING

National Ranking Awards were given to high-point riders Carrie Lyons Brandt (F1), Kari Pietsch-Wangard (F2), and Doug Smith (T4), who were in attendance; awards will be sent to Ásta Covert (T1 and V1), Anne-Marie Martin (T2), Lucy Nold (T3 and V2), Mitch Martin (T5 and V3), Olivia Rasmussen (T6), Kelly Blough and Tammy Martin (tied T7), Julia Hasenauer (T8), Alicia Flanigan (V5), and Emma Erickson (V6). See Issue One 2015 of the *Quarterly* for more information on the National Ranking Awards.

## BREYER MODELS

As reported in Issue Four 2014, Breyer released a model Icelandic horse in August of 2014 as part of their exclusive Premiere



Northern California trainers and sisters Heidi Benson (left) on her gelding Tígull frá Hrólfstaðahelli and Laura Benson on the five-year-old stallion Leiftur from Locust Hill were just horsing around when a passerby took this snapshot. Leiftur likes to mimic everything his best buddy Tígull does!

collection. The company donated two of the limited edition models to the USIHC to be given away at the Annual Meeting. The winners, chosen by random drawing, were Jer Oliver and Leslie Chambers.

## BREED AMBASSADORS

The Breed Ambassador Award was launched in 2014 “to acknowledge people who have taken their horses out into the non-Icelandic world and shown them off,” said Promotion Committee chair Juli Cole.

Entrants sent a photo of them and their horse at an all-breed event, along with the name and date of the event, to Juli or posted it on the USIHC Facebook page. Each event equaled one entry in the end-of-the-year random drawing, which took place at the Annual Meeting.

The following five winners each received a \$50 Visa gift card and a Breed Ambassador shirt:

Jane Wasson, who rode Snjókorn from Azur in the MDPFHA Judged Pleasure Trail Ride held in Somerset, PA,

Gloria Verrecchio, DVM, who rode in the Blockhouse Steeplechase held in Tyron, NC.

Grace Strausser, who rode Spurning

frá Arnarhóli in the PPWHA Home Run Fun Show in Dillsburg, PA.

Alice Ryan, who rode Kostur frá Köldukinn in the Extreme Obstacle Clinic held in Newfane, VT.

Dorothy Connors, who rode Flauta frá Ytra-Valdarási in the May Day Gaited Classic Show held in Dillsburg, PA.

## PLEASURE RIDER AWARDS

The winners of the 2014 Pleasure Rider Program Awards are Jill Carroll (Central/Mountain Division), Ann Mitchell Yowell (East), Sandie Weaver (Pacific), Brooke Wehrheim (Youth), and Alys Culhane (All Stars). Congratulations to the St. Skutla Regional Club for having the highest club participation. The complete standings for 2014 are available on the Pleasure Rider Scoreboard at [www.icelandics.org/prpscore](http://www.icelandics.org/prpscore).

## TREASURER'S REPORT

A comparison of the Congress's income and expense figures in 2013 and 2014, USIHC treasurer Kari Pietsch-Wangard said at the Annual Meeting, shows that “in 2014 we have a big change. After many years of ending up on the plus side, we ended up in the negative.” Though being



in the red is a bad sign for most treasurers, Kari joked, in this case it's a good thing: "This board has been trying hard to get funds out to people who will really use them for the good of the membership and the Icelandic horse."

In terms of income, she noted that the biggest change was due to the number of horses registered in 2014. "The Registry income went up 84 percent!" Why? Kari attributed it to the incentive of Dawn Shaw, who was awarded the Sleipnir Award, as noted above, for her efforts in making sure rescue horses were registered. Kari also thanked registrar Ásta Covert for processing all these registrations. "Ásta was very busy this year, thanks to Dawn."

Compared to the changes on the expense side, however, these increases were small. Registry expenses rose in tandem with the increased number of registrations. The *Quarterly* expenses went up significantly (56.9 percent), because of the change to color printing. But the big difference was in funding programs: "Our funding program expenses went up 1,707 percent!" Kari said, due to the new funding programs the Congress put into effect in 2014. "This year," she concluded, "we worked really hard to generate a loss!"

## YOUTH

Carrie Lyons Brandt was asked to represent the Youth Committee and report on the first American Youth Cup, for riders ages 12 to 17, which will be held at Swallowland Farm in Eminence, KY in July. "This idea," Carrie said, "started in a discussion I had with Ayla Green"—a USIHC youth member from California, the daughter of trainer Heidi Benson—who attended the FEIF Youth Cup, on which the American Youth Cup is modeled.

"We wrote up our ideas last winter and got a bunch of feedback from a group that I hand-selected of teachers, trainers, and people involved in youth and Icelandic horse events," Carrie said. Then she and Ayla presented the idea to the USIHC Youth Committee and received more feedback before Youth Committee chair Colleen Monsef took the revised plan to the USIHC Board. "They

gave us more feedback and we revised our proposal again and the board approved it—and they will support us with quite a lot of funding from the Grant Proposal Fund, the Sanctioned Show Fund, and the Youth Fund," Carrie said. "I particularly want to thank Doug Smith for being very active in planning this event and helping to make it happen." The young riders will need to pay a fee to participate, "but we are looking for sponsors for kids who need it," Carrie said. "We want this program to be self-supporting, but it is key to us to have this USIHC support in order to be able to organize the first one."

The idea, she explained, "is to bring together youth to build friendships, learn, and compete." As at the FEIF Youth Cup, "no one brings their own horse to the event," Carrie explained. "The horses will be selected randomly, and the teams will mix up kids from different parts of the country." The week-long program will include training, a fieldtrip and other

events, and will conclude with a USIHC-sanctioned Sport competition (that, unlike the FEIF Youth Cup, will also be open to adult participants).

Carrie thanked Deb Cook and Alex Pregitzer, who are overseeing the application process; riding instructors Asta Covert and Laura Benson, who have volunteered to help Carrie and Terral Hill of Swallowland Farm with the training section of the event; team leaders Coralee Denmeade, Kevin Draeger, Madison Prestine, and Ayla Green; and judges Will Covert, Alex Dannemann, and Deb Cook.

Commented USIHC President Sara Lyter, "This is a good example of a successful proposal for our Grant Program. This type of project is exactly what we were looking for. It's a whole package, something someone else can pick up later. It can happen right now, at this location, and then it can go somewhere else. It has a good chance of continuing year to year."



Carrie Lyons Brandt on a training ride in Kentucky. Carrie is one of the organizers of this year's American Youth Cup, sponsored by the USIHC and to be held at her farm, Léttleiki Icelandics, in late July. Photo by Shaila Sigsgaard.



Dave Loftness of Riverbrink Stables in River Falls, WI, wears the vest he won by accumulating hours in the USIHC's Pleasure Riding Program. With him is Demantur from Nordurstjarna, who was responsible for the majority of those riding hours. Photo by Eve Loftness.

## EDUCATION

In 2014, the Education Committee was divided into interest groups. One is publishing the Riding Badge manual written by Bernie Willis. "It's great material," said committee liaison Katrin Sheehan, "but it's just text. Coralee Denmeade is now editing it and putting in pictures." As sections are ready, they will be posted on the USIHC website for members to download. "This is a great new member perk!"

A second group is translating the trainer-C materials from German. When finished, the translation will be available to USIHC members only under the copyright agreement with the German Icelandic Horse Federation (IPZV).

A third group is investigating putting educational videos onto the USIHC home page.

Katrin also reported on the success of the first Sport Judges Seminar, held in association with the 2014 Kentucky Icelandic Horse Show. "We had a super turn-out, and the clinic broke even," Katrin said.

Clinician Þorgeir Guðlaugsson introduced the revised FIPO judging system, and three USIHC members passed the test.

The committee is talking about organizing a 2015 Trainer Seminar for riding instructors (or potential instructors) to receive or upgrade their certification.

Carrie Brandt reported on offering the Icelandic *knapamerki* test in Kentucky; she has received permission for the USIHC to hold these tests. This program is used in Iceland to prepare students for the matriculation test for the first year at Hólar University College. The five books of study materials—for the five levels of *knapamerki*—however, are at the moment available only in Icelandic.

## SPORT

Introducing the new sport judges matrix, Sport Leader Will Covert said that U.S. sport judges will now be ranked as A, B, or C level. Judges who have passed the FEIF test to become national judges will receive an A license. The current U.S. "intern judges" will be given either B or C licenses depending on their test scores. During a judging test, Will explained, candidates judge from a video of a past event. At the same time, the judge performing the exam judges the same video using the current judging guidelines and rules. How much the candidate's scores deviate from those given by the examining judge determines the level of license given. C-judges are qualified to judge a Schooling Show; B-judges can judge a Sanctioned Show, as long as there is also an A-judge present.

"This will open up more opportunities for our judges to get experience judging more than just schooling shows," Will noted, though he added that "the problem in going from B to A in the U.S. is seeing enough horses."

Will also reported that the 2015 World Championship Tryouts will be by video only. Two of the four sites that hosted tryouts in 2013 could not do so this year; the two others could not cover the costs alone. The video tryouts will be available for riders who want to be considered for inclusion on the U.S. team, as well as for riders who are only interested in being scored by a world-championship judge.

## BREEDING

The Breeding Committee's Annual Report is available on the USIHC website. Breeding Leader Andrea Barber noted, so her comments at the Annual Meeting covered only some 2014 highlights. These included three successful—and one unsuccessful—Young Horse Assessments held this year. The unsuccessful event, however, as reported on in Issue Four 2014 of the *Quarterly*, has resulted in a change to FEIF procedures that will improve Young Horse Assessments worldwide. In the U.S., these events will now be USIHC sanctioned. Organizers will need to fill out a new sanctioning form which will be approved by the Breeding Leader. All sanctioned Young Horse Assessments (to a maximum of 10 per year) will receive \$500 in funding for 2015.

"These are very inexpensive events," Andrea pointed out. "You don't need fancy equipment or a big arena, just a safe area. You can charge people to show their horses, and you can charge the spectators. You can combine a Young Horse Assessment with a clinic or a show—and if it's a sanctioned Sport or Breeding Show, in 2015 you will also receive \$1,000 in funding for the show."

It's very important, she noted, for even non-breeders to support Breeding Shows and Young Horse Assessments. "Remember, these breeders are working to produce your next pleasure horse! Breed-



Twelve-year-old Grace Strausser won a 2014 USIHC Ambassador Award for taking her Icelandic horse Spurning to all-breed shows. Photo by Laura Strausser.





Dot Connors, who won a 2014 USIHC Ambassador Award, riding Flauta at the Green Lane Park All Breed Paper Chase. This chase was sponsored by a 4H group called the Timbertalk Trotters; proceeds went to Shriners Childrens Hospital. Photo by Jennifer Massaro.

ing evaluations for adult horses are very expensive events to hold, and as such they need much financial support. Everybody should consider helping as much as they can.”

Added Barbara Frische, who developed the linear method for Young Horse assessments and often judges such shows, organizers can also include older horses in Young Horse evaluations. “If someone wants to know more about their riding horse, this is a good way to learn.”

The results of all young horses evaluated at a USIHC-sanctioned event are tabulated and the breeder of the highest-ranked registered horse receives the Caryn Cantella Award. The winners in 2014, as reported in Issue One 2015 of the *Quarterly*, were Barb and Dan Riva of Winterhorse Park.

Andrea also called upon Barbara Frische to clear up some controversy about how the judges for a USIHC-sanctioned Breeding Evaluation (for adult horses) are chosen. “True, there is no written rule in FIPO,” the FEIF Breeding Rules, Barbara said, “but there was a decision made in an international Breeding Leaders meeting some years ago. Before that, organizers of Breeding Shows could choose their own

judges. But some organizers always chose the same people. They became friends, and people complained.” Even if there was no actual favoritism in the judging itself, there was the appearance of bias. “The Breeding Leaders decided to make each National Breeding Leader responsible for the choice of judges.” The show organizer can request that a certain judge be excluded, if they’ve had a bad experience with that judge in the past, “but you can’t exclude every other judge, and only choose your friends.”

To make the choice of judge as objective as possible, the new procedure is for the show organizer to contact the National Breeding Leader (Andrea Barber, for the U.S.) and request a judge from Iceland or another country. For shows up to 35 horses, two judges are required, optimally from two different countries; larger shows need three judges. “Andrea then contacts the Breeding Leader in Iceland or the other country,” Barbara explains, “and he or she then makes the choice of which judge to send. Andrea can say, Not that one! But it is the decision of the other country’s Breeding Leader on who to send.”



Ambassador Award winner Jane Wasson takes her Icelandic on competitive trail rides. The USIHC Breed Ambassador Award was launched in 2014 “to acknowledge people who have taken their horses out into the non-Icelandic world and shown them off,” says Promotion Director Juli Cole.

## LEISURE RIDING

To match FEIF’s terminology and focus, the USIHC Pleasure Riding Committee has been renamed the Leisure Riding Committee, Sara Lyter announced. “FEIF is really putting a focus on leisure riders, which I find amusing, because here in the U.S. we are all primarily leisure riders.”

“The same is true in FEIF,” Doug Smith noted. “We’re all primarily leisure riders.” The challenge, he explained, is to find out what a national or international organization can do to help leisure riders. “What services can we provide? How do we attract leisure riders and get them involved?”

One effort is the Virtual Ride to the World Championships. “That engages people every couple of years. You ride—virtually—from your home to the World Championships.” As teams or individuals, you track your miles in the saddle and try to reach the competition site in time for the event. This year the World Championships organizers are taking teams that are close to the competition site in Herning, DK (and so guaranteed to score well) and pairing them with teams from New Zealand and the U.S. “who have no chance.”

Another project the FEIF Leisure Riding Committee is working on is trying to keep public lands open to horseback riders. The USIHC Leisure Riding Committee might want to take up this idea, in conjunction with the Regional Clubs.

In 2014, the FEIF committee surveyed Icelandic horse owners worldwide, asking the question, What is important in a leisure horse? “The survey got quite a large response and the U.S. was second or third in the number of responders,” Doug added.

Deb Callaway will remain chair of the new USIHC Leisure Riding committee. She and the board are currently redesigning the Pleasure Riding Program to make it more appealing to members and easier to administer.

The new Pleasure Riding Program rules and procedures will be announced on the USIHC website ([www.icelandics.org](http://www.icelandics.org)) and the USIHC Facebook page, or contact Deb at [leisure\\_riding@icelandics.org](mailto:leisure_riding@icelandics.org).



Gloria Verrecchio, shown here on a pleasure ride, won a 2014 Ambassador Award for riding in the Blockhouse Steeplechase held in Tyron, NC. Photo by Vince Verrecchio.

## PROMOTION

As well as continuing the Breed Ambassador Program, in 2015 the Promotion Committee hopes to work more closely with the Regional Clubs Committee to “figure out how to get exposure for our horses. We can’t do it on a national level,” said Promotion Committee chair Juli Cole, “we need to get the Regional Clubs involved. How can we help you? Maybe you need to know how to contact other

Icelandic horse owners? Maybe you have an event and want help getting people there? Let us know.”

## QUARTERLY

*Quarterly* Committee co-chair Nancy Marie Brown reported on the magazine’s upgrade to full color. “Thanks go to the USIHC Board for supporting the committee’s initiative, co-chair Nicki Esdorn for spearheading the effort, and the 15 committee members and up to 49 contributors per issue who provided the exceptional content and editorial oversight that makes the *Quarterly* such an effective face of the USIHC.”

Co-chairs Nicki and Nancy also developed three pages to promote the USIHC and the Registry; these pages are now standard in the magazine and will be updated as necessary.

Success of the *Quarterly*’s membership drive was hard to assess: Though 580 extra copies were distributed, membership in December 2014 was similar to that of March 2014. The 29 trainers and breeders involved, however, were enthusiastic. In 2015 free copies for promotion and recruitment will be available to



Ambassador Award winner Alice Ryan took her horse Kostur fra Köldukinn to an Extreme Obstacle Clinic at West River Stables in Newfane, VT. “Kostur was the only Icelandic out of about 10 participants,” Alice says. “We had never done anything like this, other than lots of trail riding, and Kostur did not miss a beat with anything that was asked of him. He was a fantastic ambassador of our breed.”

any USIHC member who requests them (while supplies last); contact Juli Cole at [promotion@icelandics.org](mailto:promotion@icelandics.org). Contributors also receive two free copies; they are encouraged to share them with potential new members.



The Youth Four Gait class at the 2015 Kraftur Spring Show, held at Mountain Icelandic Farm in Watsonville, CA. Left to right, judge Hulda Geirsdóttir, Elizabeth Monsef, Julia Hasenauer, Katherine Monsef, Abigail Moerer, Kasja Johnson, and Cameron Tolbert Scott. Photo by Alexandra Venable.



## THE MEMBERSHIP QUESTION

At the Annual Meeting in Minnesota in March, outgoing secretary Doug Smith analyzed the trends in USIHC membership since 2008. The charts he prepared gave us all something to think about and sparked a good brainstorming session on how to retain members.

“Our membership curve is about the same every year,” Doug explained. “Even though we switched from a calendar year membership to renewing 12 months after you joined, most memberships still expire around January 1. The more interesting thing you can learn from these charts is how many members are not renewing.”

Every year, he learned, about 88 people choose not to renew. Though some eventually do rejoin, others don't: About 350 people since 2008 have tried the USIHC and left.

“Essentially, our problem is that we have all these memberships that disappear. We *are* finding new people.” Since our overall membership stays about the same, that means we are recruiting about 80 to 90 new people every year. “But over the past few years, we've had hundreds of members who go away after one year. *Retention* is our big problem, not recruitment. It's hard to speculate why someone joins the USIHC, stays one to three years, and then disappears. What do we need to do to hang on to those people?”

He called upon the members at the meeting to provide the board with any information they could. “Do you know someone who joined and left? Do you have any information on why?”

The number of members in the USIHC is not just a matter of pride. “It determines our power in FEIF. The number of votes we have is proportional to the number of members we have. So having more members would give the U.S. more of a say in how breeding judges are chosen, for example. If we had these missing 350 people back, we'd have another vote in FEIF.”

One of the ways to retain people is to offer them more information, one member of the audience suggested. “We

do have a lot of information available in the *Quarterly*,” Doug noted, “and one idea that we're working on is to make it more available on the website.” Right after the meeting, for example, Doug changed the way Google searches the USIHC website, so that the *Quarterly* back issues are searchable.

Another idea suggested was a membership directory to make it easier for USIHC members to keep in touch. “We can't print a member booklet like we used to do,” Doug said, “because of the new privacy standards. But one thing we could offer is a contact service.” Though the logistics and protocol need to be worked out, the USIHC can act as a middleman for Regional Clubs or for USIHC members working to form new regional clubs. “For example,” Doug explained, “we are allowed to help you contact current USIHC members, old members, and anyone who has registered an Icelandic horse in a certain catchment area. All we'd need from you are the zipcode of the event, the number of miles from that zipcode that you think people would be willing to drive, and the email you want us to send out, and we can send it.”

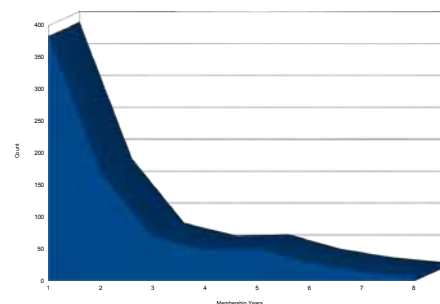
Other ideas were to give people a bonus for renewing, such as a calendar or a bumper sticker or discounts at certain stores, for example. The problems with these ideas are, in short, manpower: Who will design and produce the calendar or bumper sticker? Who will contact the stores and ask for benefits?

Access to a cheap insurance policy was another idea. The USIHC has tried to do that in the past, Kari explained, “but we couldn't find an insurer who would cover events in all the states in the U.S.” But it might be possible for the USIHC to be a conduit to help match owners with an insurance company willing to give a discount. “We're looking into it,” Kari said.

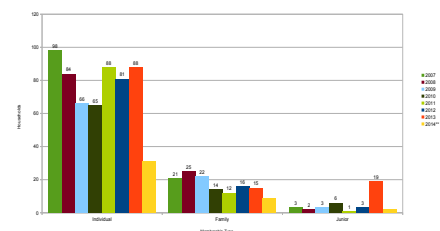
Other ideas were for the USIHC to work more closely with trainers, who create a community at the local level. Regional Clubs were also seen as key to presenting the “added value” of the USIHC to their members. “When I got

my horse in 2006,” acknowledged one member, “the USIHC was nameless and faceless. It wasn't until I began competing last year that I learned about it.”

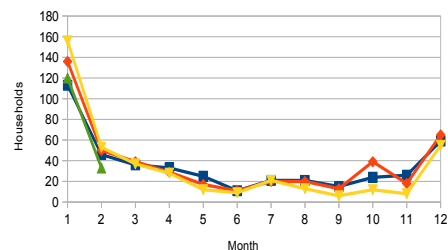
The Board thought this brainstorming session was very positive and hopes some new incentives will grow out of it.



Age of Unrenewed Memberships: This chart shows the number of years before a member leaves the USIHC. The vast majority of members who leave do so after one year.



Unrenewed Memberships: This chart shows all expired memberships by year and type. It also illustrates the fact that the free youth (junior) memberships we gave out last year did not convert into paid memberships.



Membership Trends: This chart records the general trend of membership over time. Note that the change from a calendar-year membership did not make much difference.

## WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

The Icelandic Horse World Championships will take place August 3-9 in Herning, Denmark. An International Breeding Show will be held along with the competition. The 2015 championships are organized by the Nordic Icelandic Horse Federation, a cooperation between the national Icelandic horse associations in Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Faroe Islands, and Denmark. Learn more at [www.vm2015.com](http://www.vm2015.com).

## FEIF CONFERENCE

The 2015 FEIF Conference was held in February. In addition to the department meetings and delegates assembly, participants heard a presentation by Charlotte Rabouan on promoting the Icelandic horse in France. The aim of "Pur Cheval" is to raise awareness of the Icelandic breed among French horse lovers, targeting existing riders via horse magazines, TV, horse exhibitions and events, riding schools, and clubs. See [www.purcheval.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Report-PUR-CHEVAL.pdf](http://www.purcheval.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Report-PUR-CHEVAL.pdf)

## DELEGATES ASSEMBLY

Delegates and guests from 12 FEIF member countries participated in the assembly in Copenhagen in February. The delegates agreed on editorial changes to the FEIF Statutes, as well as the addition of Leisure Riding as an official FEIF department. Some changes were made

to the World Championship rules. For all competitions, the "blood rule" will be implemented: The moment a judge sees that a horse is actively bleeding, he or she must show the red card and excuse the horse from the competition. The proposal to reduce the hoof length for breeding shows, following the outcome of the FEIF Hoof Study, was unanimously accepted. The delegates also agreed to add guidelines on embryo transfer to FIZO.

## BANNED TACK

In a joint decision, the national Sport Leaders and Breeding Leaders of the FEIF member countries agreed that the use of a flash noseband in combination with bits with leverage effects shall not be permitted in the presentation of breeding horses or in all sport competitions.

## BREEDING

The draft equipment manual was presented at the meeting of FEIF Breeding Leaders and praised as an important step toward the well-being of the Icelandic horse. A seminar to be held in 2015 will concentrate on improving the health and equipment checks at evaluations. A subcommittee is preparing a study on the optimal subsurface for pace and oval tracks. Future projects include developing guidelines for national breeding leaders, improving the evaluation of character and willingness in breeding horses, and changing the guidelines and comment-

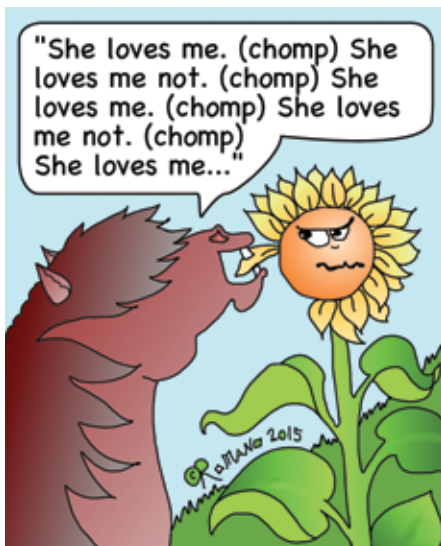
ing procedures for breeding shows. Þorvaldur Kristjánsson gave a presentation on research into the genetics of four- and five-gaitedness.

## SPORT

In light of the conclusions of the FEIF Hoof Study, the FEIF Sport Leaders recommended that the maximum allowable hoof length be reduced by 0.5 cm in the two height classes; this suggestion (already accepted for breeding shows) will be voted on at the FEIF Delegates Assembly in 2016. Among other procedural changes to competitions, the Sport Leaders decided to perform an experiment in the 2015 season: Breaks will be added to the T1 finals, during which the horse must be at a relaxed walk. The announcers will instruct the riders to walk their horses for 60 seconds at the rein change of the "speed changes" section, and 120 seconds at the rein change of the "fast tölt" section.

## EDUCATION

The FEIF Education Department agreed on the need to ensure the quality and validity of trainer licenses. A related project is to develop a job platform on the FEIF website for licensed trainers either offering or looking for a job. Another issue discussed was cooperating with the "Tölt in Harmony" Association to coordinate seminars, tests, and exams internationally.





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# REGIONAL CLUB UPDATES

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## YOUTH

The most exciting item discussed at the FEIF Youth Meeting was the FEI international video competition launched in mid-February. Small teams of young people are invited to produce a 5-minute video with the title “Happiness is [fill in your own idea].” The department hopes to bring the winning entries to a large audience at the World Championships in Herning, Denmark. The Youth Work Department is also planning to set up a virtual community of trendsetters.

## LEISURE RIDING

A discussion of how leisure riding is dealt with within the FEIF member countries revealed that in some countries it is only starting, while in other countries it has been ongoing for years. In Germany, for example, most activities relate to organizing and supporting events. In Denmark, the focus has mostly been on securing the right to access to nature for riders. The new Leisure Riding pages on the FEIF website will be a platform for sharing information on both approaches. The department also discussed the Virtual Ride “From Here to Herning” for the next World Championships and the leisure riding survey.

## USEFUL APPS

Updated versions of the Sport Judges Guidelines, the FIPO Timer, and the Young Horse Evaluation apps are now available in the Apple App Store.

The Guidelines app includes clarifications to the general description of fast tölt and the beat/balance section of trot. The correct handling of the loose rein section of T6 is described in the notes.

The Timer app now supports the experimental 60 and 120 second breaks during the finals of T1.

In the Young Horse Evaluation app, the calculation model has been updated based on feedback from the first year of use. The possible range of “Character” percentages is now wider and the arrow directions in all trait positions are factored into the percentage calculations. Import and export features have been expanded, and a general remarks field has been added to the horse information.



Cascade Icelandic Horse Club members Lisa Brandenburger and Rachel Clark ride with Johanna Bereuther from Germany at the Washington State Horse Expo (above) and on the beach in Pacific City, OR. Photos by Matt Clark.

## CASCADE (OREGON AND WASHINGTON)

BY SUSAN WELLINGTON

Seven members of the Cascade Icelandic Horse Club—Janet Boggs, Linda and Dick Templeton, Lori Birge, Lisa Roland, Linda Eddy, and Karin Daum—are participating in the FEIF-sponsored virtual ride to the 2015 World Championships in Herning, Denmark. Named The Cascadians, our team also includes Freya Sturm from Germany, Dorothy Connors from Pennsylvania, and Deborah Faver. Since last November when the ride began, the team has clocked almost

2000 km with over 4000 km to go. The ride has forged 173 riders from 15 countries into a community of leisure riders who share stories of themselves and their horses. If you haven't already registered for the ride, it's not too late. For more information, contact [herning2015@icehorses.co.uk](mailto:herning2015@icehorses.co.uk) or go to the Facebook page “From Here to Herning.”

We seldom have a chance to get all of our far-flung CIHC members together and we value the opportunities we do have. Our winter meeting in January was well attended, with 22 members present at Schwalbenhof Farm. The first quarter of 2015 saw the Icelandic horse promoted at the Washing-



ton State Horse Expo in Ridgefield. Rachel Clark and Lily Dieulafoy led that effort. Our fledgling B Drill Team, Mark and Glenda Josey, Janella Radetich, Claudia Rancore, Susan Wellington, and Kathy Lamb, got together for practice under the tutelage of experienced A Team riders Karin Daum and Linda Eddy.

Icelandic horses participated and placed in English Pleasure, English Equitation, and Gaited Horse classes in a series of schooling shows presented by Clark County Executive Horse Council. Liv Fava, Rachel Clark, Lilly Dieulafoy, Linda Eddy, Susan Wellington, Pat Colter, Jean Waller, Christine Portfors, Alice Heller, and Valerie Blessley participated. The Cascade Icelandic Horse Club is a member of CCEHC so we can place an ad in their widely circulated Equine Services Guide.

We are looking forward to Icelandic clinics at Wren Hill Farm and Red Feather Ranch in the coming months, as well as play days and the much anticipated Beach Ride. Small groups of riders will get together for trail rides as the weather improves. Pictures from some of our events can be found on our Facebook Page.

## **FIRC (MID-ATLANTIC)**

*BY RICH MOORE*

The Frida Icelandic Riding Club (FIRC) had several activities over the winter and looks forward to more. Events included the Pennsylvania Horse Expo in early March, a riding clinic with Steinar Sigurbjörnsson in March, a kick-off party in late March, and



Von frá Reykjavík and FIRC member Martin Nielsen showing beautiful form at the tölt during the schooling show at Léttleiki Icelandics. Photo taken by Ida Sophie and edited by Shaila Ann Sigsgaard.

drill team practices.

FIRC set up the USIHC booth at the Pennsylvania Horse World Expo March 5-8. Members who staffed the booth were Jo Ann, Jeremiah, and Jade Trostle; Janice and Mycah Gaydos; Sverrir Bjartmarz; Charlotte Reilly; and Laura and Anthony Colicchio. Said Anthony, "There was tremendous interest and numerous inquiries about the care and ownership of the Icelandic horse and where to take lessons to experience the gaits." Thousands of people attended the expo, and Icelandic drill team demos were performed each day. The riders were Jo Ann and Jeremiah Trostle, Janice and Mycah Gaydos, and Anthony Colicchio. "The biggest hit of the expo was Laura

Colicchio's horse, Raven, who was a great ambassador for our breed and never shied away from meeting people. Raven also was used in a demo by the gaited horse trainer Diane Sept."

Suzi McGraw writes, "On a weekend that felt more like winter in Iceland than the end of March, Fox Den Farm in Chadds Ford, PA hosted the first of four FIRC clinics by Steinar Sigurbjörnsson. The farm had a terrific indoor arena, which came in handy since we had about 4 inches of snow. In spite of the weather, spirits were high that we were bringing our horses out of winter storage and focusing on the show and trail riding season. Steinar demonstrated ground exercises that helped the horses regain balance, flexibility, and responsiveness to the aids gone rusty over the winter break. He then focused on each horse-rider team individually, diagnosing specific needs and matching training strategies for improvement." Riders for this clinic were Nancy Adler, Pat Carballo, Kathy Carpenter, Jackie Edens, Suzi McGraw, and Joan Waller. Follow-up clinics with Steinar will be held in May, June, and August, allowing riders feedback and the opportunity for ongoing, developmental coaching. These clinics will rotate among farms in Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia.

At the end of March, members of the FIRC drill team held the first practice of the season in anticipation of doing a breed demo on April 12 in Front Royal, VA at a 4H Expo. Club members riding in the practice included Sverrir Bjartmarz, Antje Freygang, Mitch Martin, and Tammy Martin. Rich Moore directed the session. On March 29,



Despite cold temperatures, FIRC member Carrie Lyons Brandt hosted a schooling show at Léttleiki Icelandics in Kentucky in March. "Judge Alexandra Dannenmann gave riders comments during and after their rides, helping participants bring out the best in their horses and their riding," Carrie notes. "There were many exciting performances from professionals, amateurs, and youth riders. Following the Icelandic tradition many audience members watched from their cars, so there was both clapping and honking cheering on the show!" Here, Carrie rides Svali frá Tjörn in loose rein tölt. Photo taken by Ida Sophie and edited by Shaila Ann Sigsgaard.





Signs of spring from Flugnir Regional Club member Lavonne Fraasch in Milbank, SD: Blíða and Athena enjoying a good scratch, while eight-year-old Aubree leads Kolfinna from Tolthaven Ranch. Photos by Amber Fraasch.



Sally Thorpe and Sam and Julie Castleman hosted the annual FIRK Kick-Off party and meeting in Thurmont, MD. About 25 FIRK members attended. Prior to the meeting, Brandon Wise, a horse trainer from Maryland, gave an interesting talk and demonstration on getting flexibility and softness in horses. Brandon will be giving a clinic for FIRC members in September. After the demonstration the attendees moved to the beautiful ThorpeWood Lodge, where they shared a bountiful and delicious lunch with food provided by the club and by attendees. Afterwards club president Pat Moore and board members updated the club on the activities and plans for 2015.

## **KLETTAFJALLA (ROCKY MOUNTAINS)**

*BY MARISUE WELLS*

The Rocky Mountain club serves a very large territory—Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, Wyoming, and Montana! We have recently elected Kristina Behringer (president), Lee Ann Ott (secretary), Marisue Wells (treasurer), and three board members at large, Julia Andersen, Coralie Denmeade, and Maile Behringer, and plan to appoint regional member contacts in each state with the intention of bringing about greater awareness and promotion of local activities for Icelandic owners and riders. Let us know if you're interested in

being a regional contact.

We have had a recent influx of new members and are excited to get to know them in upcoming activities. Additionally, we may be arranging a group trip to Iceland. We are working to get more youth involved with Icelandics, and our junior member-at-large, Maile Behringer, has been thinking of ways to meet other Icelandic loving youth. She and Zoe Johnson have applied to the American Youth Cup and are also very excited about participating in a clinic with Guðmar Pétursson this fall.

We have been updating our website and making sure we are providing an all-inclusive resource for our members. Members are able to search for members in their



Coralie Denmeade and the Tamangur drill team at the Colorado Horse Expo's Mane Event.



Members of the Klettafjalla Club promoted the Icelandic horse at the Colorado Horse Expo. Here, youth member Maile Behringer shows off their booth.



“Horses on Fire” was the theme of the drill team routine performed by Klettafjalla members at the Colorado Horse Expo’s Mane Event. Here, Zoe Johnson shows off her costume.

area and for local or national events, and to post classified ads. We have also continued to provide direct links to breeders.

Recently we had a well-attended natural horsemanship clinic at Tamangur Icelandic Horses in Monument, CO with excellent teaching by Tom Mowery. In addition, Coralie Denmeade and the Tamangur drill team impressed the audience at the Colorado Horse Expo’s Mane Event with their “Horses on Fire!” demo. Naturally everyone was smitten with the cheery Icelandic tolt and of course, the finale of the whole expo, the beer tolt!

## **KRAFTUR (NORTHERN CALIFORNIA)**

BY BERT BATES

It was a seemingly quiet winter for Kraftur club members. Guðmar Pétursson flew in from Iceland to give back-to-back clinics in Los Gatos and Santa Cruz (at Coast Stables). Steinar Sigurbjörnsson traveled from the remote hamlet of Bonny Doon to give a clinic at Mountain Icelandics. Zooming way out... As a participant and observer of many clinics over the years, it’s fascinating and gratifying to me to see riders, horses, and clinicians all getting better over time. You can observe riders see-

ing things in more detail. Seats are improving, aids are timed better and are getting more subtle. Horses are moving better and are working in healthier, more athletic frames.

In other news, Kraftur members have been furiously preparing for our Spring Show, which will be held at Mountain Icelandics. (As an aside, it’s always interesting to prepare these reports for the *Quarterly*. It feels a bit like being a time traveler. As of this writing, the show is two weeks away. But I also know that by the time you read this article, the show will be a pleasant memory ... interesting.)

In March, member Danielle Mayland rode Trygggur in a ACTHA (American Competitive Trail Horse Association) show. Depending how you count, they took either fourth or fifth place out of 20 horses ... an Icelandic representin’! Their picture appears on the April 2015 issue of the ACTHA Monthly.

Over the last few years, the Santa Cruz region has grown into quite a hot spot for Icelandic horses. The Kraftur club now has over 70 members. While exact numbers of horses are always in flux, we’re pleased to report that there are four large pockets of riders and horses and many other small collections of

horses in the Bay Area associated with Kraftur:

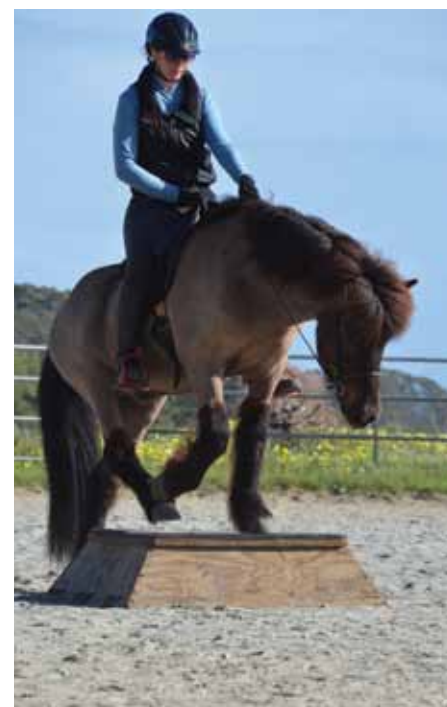
- The crew in Los Gatos typically has 10-15 horses.
- The horde in Santa Cruz (at Coast Stables) typically has 40-50 horses ... wow!
- Watsonville is home to 20-25 horses.
- Northern Monterey County is home to yet another 15-20 horses.
- There are at least another 10-20 horses scattered throughout the greater Bay Area.

Looking to the near future, Kraftur members are planning group trail rides, and overnight horse camping outings (thanks to Lisa Herbert). We are preparing to participate in local, multi-breed dressage competitions, and we plan to organize several more Tolt-in-Harmony shows. Finally, we will continue to participate in multi-breed gaited shows: We cannot recommend these shows too highly—they are a great way to promote the Icelandic horse.

We hope you all had (will have) a great Spring!



Katherine Monsef rides Fleygur at the Guðmar Pétursson clinic organized by the Kraftur Club. Photo by Colleen Monsef.



This photo of Kraftur member Laura Hinson’s Icelandic horse, Trygggur, ridden by Danielle Mayland, appeared on the cover of the ACTHA Monthly. Photo by Eleanor Anderson.



## NEIHC (NORTHEAST)

BY JESSICA HAYNSWORTH

It was a cold and challenging winter in the Northeast, with some cities experiencing record-breaking amounts of snow. But that doesn't mean our club members stopped riding! Here, like in Iceland, our motto is that when the going gets tough, the tough bundle up and get going!

On February 14-15, NEIHC members Charlotte Reilly and I made the trip down to Kentucky for a fun and exciting event: Léttleiki Icelandic's annual Trainers Clinic. This year's clinician was Rasmus Müller Jensen, on his very first visit to the U.S. Riders gathered from as far as California and Canada for this clinic, and it was great fun to ride with our friends and have the opportunity to learn from such a skilled clinician while also enjoying Léttleiki's gorgeous facilities and talented horses.

On March 8, the NEIHC celebrated our 10th annual Thorrablot. Says Nicki Esdorn, "More than 30 members attended the NEIHC meeting and party held, as every year, on the first Saturday in March. Members met at Thor Icelandics in Claverack, NY in the early afternoon, where the usual tack sale was set up in the cozy barn aisle, and they were also treated to some nice hot chocolate! Due to ugly winter weather the group ride did not take place. A shuttle service provided by Simon Kooyman then ferried everyone over to Charlotte and Simon's welcoming nearby home. President Martina Gates did a recap of the 2014 club events. Treasurer Leslie Chambers reported that the club is

in good shape financially and will be able to hold all planned 2015 events with the help of membership income and USIHC support. Board member Jess Haynsworth proposed fundraising for a world ranking event to be held at Léttleiki Icelandics in Kentucky, and she also proposed organizing a video competition for a Tolt in Harmony class. Stay tuned! Full minutes are posted on the NEIHC website at [www.neihc.com](http://www.neihc.com). The Thorrablot was a great success, with a delicious potluck dinner and dessert and lively conversations as members were making plans to meet and ride and have fun with their horses again!"

We have a number of exciting events to look forward to:

The Bunny Hop ride, a group fun ride that usually happens on Easter Sunday, was postponed due to weather and rescheduled for May. Riders will gather at Thor Icelandics.



NEIHC member Jess Haynsworth and Rós in a pace lesson at the Léttleiki Trainers' Clinic in Kentucky. Photo by Hanna Dilts.



NEIHC member Bailey Soderberg and her horse, Prímus from Silver Maple, enjoy a bareback tölt through the snow in Massachusetts. Photo by Leann Soderberg



NEIHC member Lesley Chambers and Herdís from Mill Farm at Thor Icelandics in Claverack, NY. Photo by Amy Goddard

West Wind Farm in Delhi, NY will host clinics with Steinar Sigurbjörnsson on April 24-26 and again on June 26-28.

NEIHC's annual Games Day will be held on June 6 at West Wind Farm. This has been a very popular event in the past, and we look forward to another fun day with great people and great horses!

At Merrimack Valley Icelandics/Springtide Farm in Northshore MA, Ebba Meehan will teach a clinic on June 28.

Most exciting of all is our third annual NEIHC Open, a USIHC-sanctioned competition to be held on July 11-12 at Thor Icelandics. Hulda G. Geirsdóttir will return to judge for the second year in a row. This competition is always exciting and well-attended, with great riders and



NEIHC member Jana Meyer out on a ride in Woodstock, VT. Photo by Sarah Porter.

horses joining us from all over the country and from Canada for a fun and exciting weekend. We look forward to seeing many of you there, and hope you will join us for some of our other events as well.

In the fall, the club will organize a Tolt in Harmony clinic at Thor Icelandics on Sept 18-20. Finally, we will have a booth at Equine Affaire November 12-15, and hopefully do another great performance in the Fantasia show.

## ST SKUTLA CLUB

BY DEB CALLAWAY

You know the winter in Western New York is dragging on a bit too long when a person looks forward to a weekend away in Minneapolis, MN in March! But that describes me. We had the coldest February on record in and around Rochester, NY so even a get-away to Minnesota was a welcome change of scenery, if not temperature. Weather notwithstanding, I was really very excited to attend my first USIHC Annual Meeting.

It was not my first USIHC meeting however: I had joined a teleconference call in February. I had not realized how very easy it is to do so. I was afraid I needed special equipment or skills or qualifications. Any member of USIHC is invited to call and audit the monthly meetings. The Board of Directors meets monthly, usually the third Tuesday of each month. The exact date of each meeting is posted on the calendar page

on the USIHC web site at [www.icelandics.org](http://www.icelandics.org). The agenda is posted on the bulletin board page the weekend before each meeting. The individual member is responsible for any toll charges to connect to the call. Auditors are asked to report their presence during the roll call at the start of the meeting or immediately upon joining an in-progress call. Auditors are expected to remain silent unless called upon by the president. Conference calls may be recorded.

I put a reminder in my phone to check for the next conference call meeting. I looked forward to meeting the people I had heard during my first called in meeting and many of the other members I had corresponded with by email during my time with USIHC, and now I look forward to listening in on the future meetings and hearing from all the people I met at the Annual Meeting!

The Annual Meeting itself was held in a very well-appointed conference room, complete with catered meals and snacks throughout the day. The meet-

ing was fairly large, about 40 members were there, some for the whole day and some for a limited time. Being that large of a group meant there were the usual rules for meetings, but still it was a very relaxed and casual atmosphere. I did not expect to have educational and entertaining presentations at the Annual Meeting but there were both. There were raffle drawings with fun gifts. Although the majority of the members were from the local club, Flugnir, people attended from as far away as California and Georgia. We all had at least one thing in common, the Icelandic horse, and there is no better ice breaker than that. The event was closed with a lovely dinner at a restaurant called Grave.

Overall, I can't remember ever having as much fun without a horse! I met so many nice people and had a wonderful time. I honestly look forward to attending another Annual Meeting and am already budgeting to include the trip in my 2016 travel plans!



Deb Callaway and her horse Fenja from Rocking R. Photo by Andrea Barber.



# THE STORY BEHIND THE SLEIPNIR AWARD

BY DAWN SHAW

At the USIHC Annual Meeting in March, president Sara Lyter presented Dawn Shaw (in absentia) with the Sleipnir Award. She said: "On behalf on the USIHC, we are pleased to present you with the Sleipnir Award to recognize your contributions to the Icelandic horse community. This award is given to individuals who go above and beyond for the benefit of the Icelandic horse in the United States. We greatly appreciate your countless hours spent assisting with the re-homing and registration process of Icelandic horses in California and the Pacific Northwest. You are a true friend to this breed that we all love. Thank you Dawn." The *Quarterly* asked Dawn to tell us more. Here's her story:

## AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK

In February 2014, when I was first asked to help re-home 56 purebred Icelandic horses from Schmalztopf farm in Buellton, California, I said no.

Not just no, but hell no.

I had my reasons, and I didn't hold back in expressing them. For example, most of the horses weren't even halter-broke, let alone trained to ride, and over half the horses were mature stallions. The average age of the horses was mid-to-late teens, with the youngest being 10 years old. The only trained riding horses were over the age of 20, and most of those hadn't been ridden in over a decade. In addition, only 13 of the 56 horses on the farm were registered, and I wasn't sure how many of the others could be. Given all this, I felt that it would be difficult to re-home such horses, and I didn't want to set myself an impossible task.

When I hung up the phone, I figured that was that. But it wasn't.

Peggy Bomer wouldn't take no for an answer. She called me back and addressed some of my concerns, expressing that she would be my primary point of contact and convincing me that I would not go completely insane trying to do this.



Dawn Shaw was honored with the Sleipnir Award by the USIHC for her work in rescuing, registering, and finding new homes for over 50 Icelandic horses. She is shown here with her rescue mare, Nótt. Photo by Susan Smith.

She also promised that she and her husband Edwin, who is the son of the Schmalztopf owners, would do everything possible to facilitate the registration of those horses that could be registered. That was a big point for me, because I didn't want to be a participant in dumping yet another large number of purebred but unregistered horses out into the already crowded horse community. I am grateful that Peggy and Edwin were willing to do right by the horses by giving them history and value.

In the interest of the horses, and uncertain of their fate if I didn't help out, I acquiesced to at least try, with no guarantee of results.

This wasn't the first time I'd been involved in farm dispersals. I helped Red Hill in Oregon disperse after the elderly owner had a stroke. I aided two families, one with just a few horses and one with about a dozen, find new homes for their horses. Beginning in 2010, I supported the huge Extreme Farms dispersal by helping to spread the word and assisting with finding parents via DNA and subsequent registration when possible. Not all of the Icelandics involved in these projects were given away, but those that were sold were often priced considerably below market value.

In my experience, reasons that farms and families end up needing or wanting



A group of Icelandic mares in the pasture at Schmalztopf, before the farm was closed. Photo by Terry Alberts.

to re-home their horses include advancing age, medical or financial problems, breeding but not being willing or able to invest in the training and handling that would make the horses marketable, or a change in priorities.

There were a few factors working in favor of the Schmalztopf horses. The majority were sturdily built, came from good German bloodlines, and were pretty, with long manes and expressive, curious eyes. They were at least used to having people around, so they weren't completely feral. In addition, the majority of the unregistered horses already had been DNA verified to their parents, which gave registration a significant head start.

Then I was told I couldn't post anything on Facebook.

### **STILL IMPOSSIBLE**

"We're worried about the wrong information being spread around and attracting people whose sole interest is acquiring a free horse."

I totally understood that line of reasoning. However, I made my position clear.

"This is going to be impossible without Facebook."

I was right.

I came up with solutions, including having myself as an initial point of contact so I could screen inquiries. I started a Facebook group strictly dedicated to the horses from Schmalztopf. On this platform, I and others who had visited the farm could post photos and information. I answered questions and engaged in discussions about the available horses. As best I could, I guarded the personal contact information for owner and breeder Arvid Schmalz, who is 80 and still living on the farm with the horses. (His wife, Nancy, was living out of state.) Arvid would have the final say over where each of his horses would be going.

Peggy had created a Dropbox file, which included the list of available horses as well as photos and information about each of them. It also contained her contact information. I guarded that link as best I could as well, asking that people not share it. Of course there were some information leaks, and the initial response was quite overwhelming for all of us. Still, communication between me and Peggy, and between Edwin and Arvid, was consistent, which was imperative to the success of the project.

We had several situations where people wanted the same horse, and many situations where someone would commit, then back out. But while disappointing, that was bound to happen and it became a normal part of the process. Since Arvid made the final decisions regarding re-homing, it wasn't always first come, first served. As frustrating as it could be at times, I understood and respected that this was not an easy process for him, as he had to say goodbye to all these horses that were like children to him.

### **AN INDESCRIBABLE THRILL**

In April I was able to visit the farm. I took photos of some of the horses and pulled hair on a few that we still needed DNA from—at least the ones I could get close enough to. Eventually Arvid was able to provide me with hair samples for the few remaining. Using information from Arvid and a good relationship with UC Davis, which does all the DNA testing for the U.S. Icelandic horse registry, we were able to get parent verification results for all the horses.

There's an indescribable thrill when opening an email from UC Davis, saying that a match has been found. It's like un-



wrapping a Christmas present from someone you know will give you the perfect gift, but you're not sure what it is. It's even better when you discover that the verified parents mean the horse can be registered. (This was especially true for the Extreme Farms horses, when often neither parent was known.)

In a few cases, we had to register mares that were no longer on the farm just so we could register their offspring. Also, as word spread of this effort, a few owners of unregistered Schmalztopf horses that had been sold or re-homed previously surfaced, asking what it would take to register their horse. In most cases, we have been able to provide the necessary documentation. As of this writing, our efforts have resulted in the registration of 30 Schmalztopf horses. Approximately 14 additional horses have everything they need to be registered, and I sincerely hope their owners will take advantage of this opportunity. After all, registration is for the benefit of the horse, not the owner.

Only four of the Schmalztopf horses that I had direct involvement with proved unable to be registered.

By February 2015, almost exactly a year after the ball initially got rolling, all the horses had been placed and were off the farm. Peggy, Arvid, and I know we all did the best we could under the circumstances. I am grateful to everyone who adopted these horses, especially those who took multiple horses and even came back for more as the need arose. I am also especially grateful to those people who were willing to take on the extra care and retirement of the geriatric and special-needs horses. Some of these homes are new to the Icelandic horse community, and we emphatically welcome you.

## ICELANDIC HORSE RESCUE

When I learned that I had received the USIHC's Sleipnir Award for my efforts during this and past re-homing projects, I was deeply touched. I feel very fortunate to be a member of an organization that recognizes such efforts, and I display the plaque proudly and prominently.

With the Schmalztopf re-homing project over, the Facebook group has morphed into the more generic page *Icelandic Horse Rescue and Registration—North America*. Here people can share information about any Icelandic horse that needs to be re-



Owner and breeder Arvid Schmalz, age 80, with Irpa from Schmalztopf. Photo by Monica Urrutia-Sheehan.

homed or rescued. It's also a place where owners of rescued and re-homed horses can share stories, photos, and the progress they are making with these horses. Questions regarding the registration of any Icelandic horse are welcome, regardless of the horse's origin.

*Dawn Shaw is an author, webinar host, and professional speaker in addition to running her small Icelandic farm, Lone Cedar Icelandic Horses, in Grapeview, WA. Find her at [www.LoneCedarIcelandicHorses.com](http://www.LoneCedarIcelandicHorses.com) or [www.FacingUptoIt.com](http://www.FacingUptoIt.com) or contact her at 360-275-7542 or [iceherd@hotmail.com](mailto:iceherd@hotmail.com)*



Two of the Schmalztopf horses that were in need of new homes in April 2014, Garpur (chestnut) and Fagur (black). Photo By Dawn Shaw.



# THE OBSTACLE COURSE

BY NANCY MARIE BROWN

“When we have a horse that we need to be brave, we ask Eve to train it—because every horse is brave for Eve,” said Deb Cook, when introducing Eve Loftness and her husband Dave at the USIHC Annual Meeting in Minneapolis on March 7.

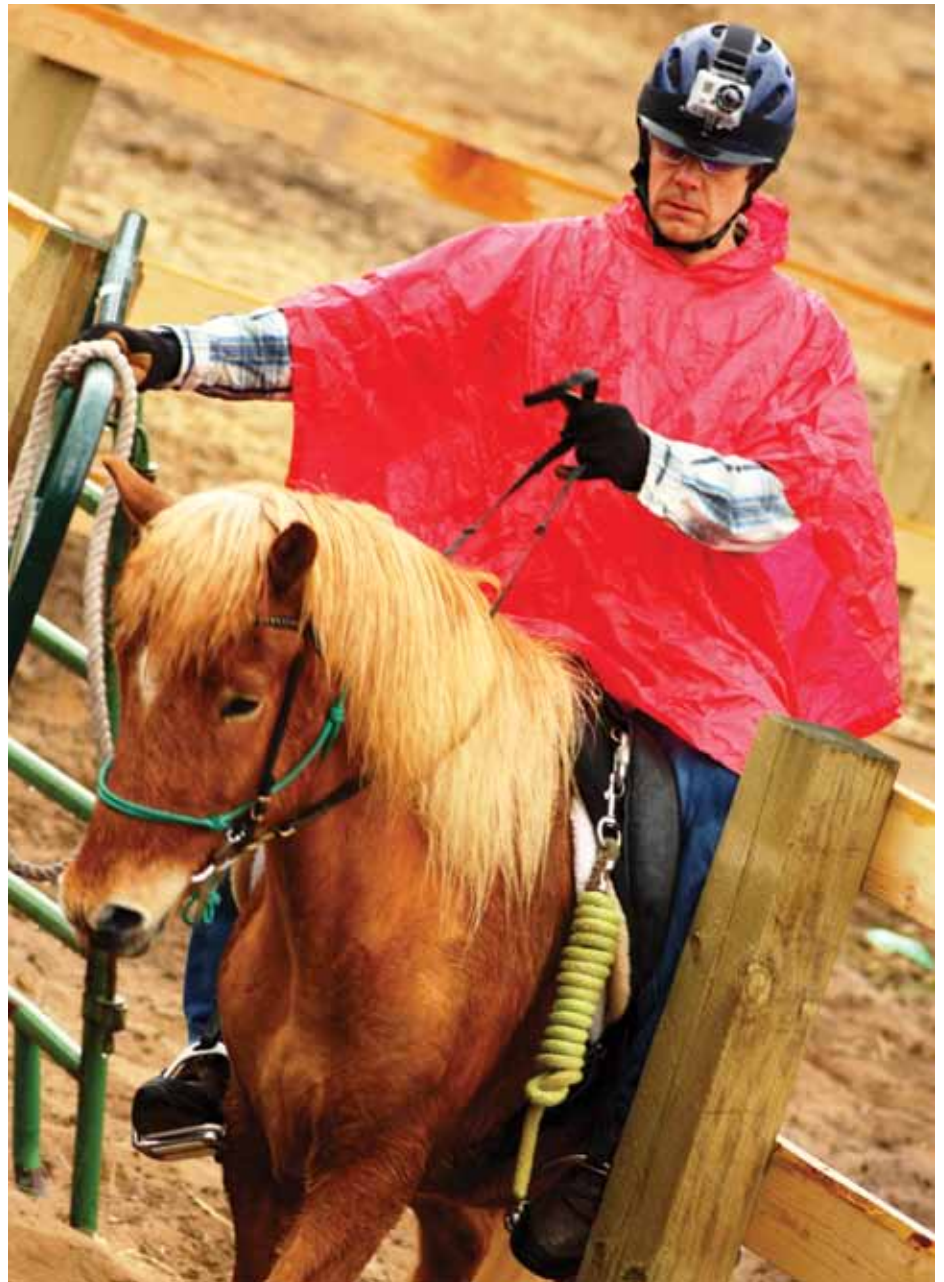
Eve and Dave compete in competitive trail challenges on their Icelandic horses. Often these events are organized by ACTHA, the American Competitive Trail Horse Association, the largest competitive trail competition organization in the U.S. Nearly 10,000 horses have competed in ACTHA events since the organization was founded in 2008. According to the ACTHA website ([www.actha.us](http://www.actha.us)), “Each event is a casual trail ride competition that is six to eight miles long, with six judged obstacles (mostly natural) along the way, chosen from over 30 official obstacles.” Rides benefit horse rescues at the national level; local affiliates hold rides to benefit other charities.

## A PARTNERSHIP

“They say that dogs are man’s best friend,” said Eve. “I believe horses have become man’s best partner over the centuries. This is really the focus of our interactions with horses: It’s a partnership.”

Competing in trail challenges on their Icelandic horses is one of the ways Eve and Dave and others develop that partnership. Cindy Nadler and Andri frá Hólabaki, for example, were the ACTHA National 3rd Place winners for the 2011-2012 season, out of over 5,000 horses. They are an ACTHA State Winner and in the top 3 places in 26 out of 32 competitive trail competitions, and Andri has been designated a Gold Medal Horse. “Cindy traveled great distances to accomplish this, and it is really amazing, considering our riding season in the Upper Midwest is shorter than in places further south, where ACTHA rides occur year-round. ACTHA is headquartered in Texas.”

Eve herself was the 2011 ACTHA State Winner for Wisconsin, riding Spýrna



Dave Loftness rides Demantur from Nordurstjarna in the ACTHA Ride at Camp Shamineau, Motley MN, in 2011. The obstacle was to open, pass through, and close a gate. For keeping his hand on the gate, Dave received a higher score. Photo by Jeremy Moulton.

frá Reykjavík. She was in the top 3 in 12 of 21 competitive trail competitions, and Spýrna is a Silver Medal Horse. Eve also competes in Extreme Cowboy Association (ExCA) challenges and was Regional Champion in 2009 and 2010, in addition to a 2009 1st place finish in an annual

Trail Trials event sponsored by the Minnesota Walking Horse Association.

Competing in these sorts of events is not only fun, they’re good promotion for the Icelandic horse. “Eve’s experiences in Extreme Cowboy competitions,” said Dave, “include competing against larger,



faster stock horses.”

Added Eve, “When Cindy and I showed up with our ‘ponies’ the first time—they called them ‘ponies’—one trainer said, ‘This is no place for ponies.’ I said to Cindy, ‘What will he say when we beat him?’” Later, after a few successful competitions and seeing Dave ride Spyrna in a competition, the same trainer came up to Eve and asked in all sincerity, “What did he do to get to ride the Cadillac?”

Cindy did get scored down at one trial when Andri töltd, Eve noted. “They said he was tense, because his head was up.” Sometimes you need to politely educate the judges—who may never have seen an Icelandic horse before. “Keep your approach positive. Be courteous and friendly.” On a handout the Loftnesses prepared for their talk, they add, “Judges are typically equestrians themselves, but often with little specific training as a judge for obstacles. Having them reiterate the obstacle criteria will re-focus them as well. A friendly conversation with the judge could also present you as a respectful and personable equestrian, and it usually helps to be riding an adorable Icelandic horse! Ask the judge to record comments about your attempt, to improve your future riding.”

And remember to thank them afterwards. “They have volunteered to be a judge and would probably rather be riding.”

## OBSTACLE TYPES

These competitions test your basic equitation skills and how you cue your horse. You may have to step or jump over or around an object. You may have to trot or gait to a stop, weave poles, turn on the forehand or the haunches, side pass, and back in a pattern or around objects. Other obstacles require you or your horse to interact with an object and continue moving: ride over a bridge or tarp, ride through a stream or into a body of water, or ride through a cowboy curtain or a gate. You may have to drag a log or a bag full of noisy cans. Or stop at a mailbox and remove the contents—which could be a big, scary plastic bag, not a letter. You may be asked to pick up a rain slicker and put it on, use a stick to pick up a hat, spray your horse, or dismount and remount in an odd place. You may have to pick up a bucket of water and pour its

contents into another bucket a few steps down the trail.

All obstacles include an approach, a timed task, and a departure, as well as a judge, Eve and Dave explained. Both the communication between horse and rider and the willingness of the horse are usually judged, and each obstacle is timed. If you don’t complete the obstacle in the allotted time, you get no points, so ask the judge to give you a warning when ten seconds remain. “This should give you time to exit the obstacle and acquire at least some points,” they note.

The more subtle your cues are to your horse, the higher your scores will be. Coaching other riders isn’t allowed, but you can praise a job well done.

## CONQUERING THE COURSE

As for how they train for these events, Dave stressed, “We are not professionals and by no means experts, but we’ve sought and received advice from various trainers and other riders, as well as having learned through first-hand trial and error. Participating in organized events and receiving judges’ scores and comments has allowed us to improve. Today we present to you some of our experience. There are many methods, but all seem to have the same goal.”

“Does your horse trust you?” That, said Eve, is the most important thing. “The horse is looking for a leader. It wants someone to lead it, and you can provide this leadership. No matter what’s going on, if you stay relaxed on your horse, you’re going to be fine. Don’t look at your horse’s ears. Don’t look down. Make yourself balanced—being balanced is the most important part of getting through an obstacle.”

Another important point in training is not to rush. “Expose your horse slowly—don’t drill! Keep it fun, safe, and rewarding for your horse.” Keep your “brain work” sessions short, and always end on a “win,” no matter how small.

And listen to your horse—a bad experience “can be imprinted.” Once Cindy Nadler took her horse Andri over a slippery wet teeter-totter and he slipped downwards. “They have very long memories.” Andri is still wary of bridges. “If you push a horse too fast through an obstacle, it might remain spooked for a long time. And the worst thing to do

when your horse spooks is to make a big deal out of it. Deep breathing and full exhalation usually work wonders and take only seconds.”

Remember that “a new and challenging situation will elevate your energy level, and your horse picks up on this. If you as a rider have doubts about an obstacle, those doubts will likely transfer to your horse as a signal of alert, possibly danger.” As a rider, you need to “be conscious of your energy level. If you are relaxed, your horse should recognize the calm and have no sense of danger.”

“Imagine doing the obstacle on your own,” Dave said. “Your thoughts of the steps to take will transfer to your horse through subtle, possibly unconscious movements. That is, what movements or balance or physics would be necessary for you yourself to perform the obstacle? Look ‘through’ the obstacle to where you want to finish. Don’t look at the object itself. Your fundamental aids remain the same. Trust your cues and let your horse balance with you.”

## TRYING THE COURSE

At the end of their talk, Dave and Eve called for volunteers for an obstacle exercise that Barbara Frische and Deb Cook would judge.

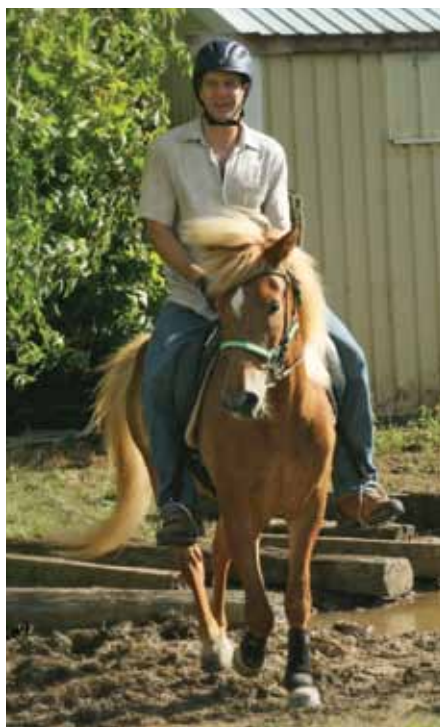
They asked the two volunteer “horses” (blindfolded and wearing latex horse-heads masks) to “be your horse. During the obstacles, try to mirror what you think your horse would do in the same situation, and act accordingly.”

The other two volunteers “rode” their horses with a rope looped around their waists. They were only allowed to use one-word commands: stop (or whoa), go (or a click), stand, over, and back. “You can praise your horse, it’s encouraged! Penalty points off your horsemanship score if you stray from one-word commands.” (Remember, the “horses” can’t see.)

The judges were told to “basically judge the communication between rider and horse,” both their physical cues (through the rope) and the one-word commands.

The course itself (designed from crumpled paper, balloons, and other items) had four simulated obstacles. As Eve described them, they were:

Loki’s Loop: “Ride” to the hula hoop and ride your horse through hoop, then back into the hoop and position your



This obstacle, at the ExCA ride at Truhaven Ranch in Wilmar, MN in 2010, was a water crossing. Here, Dave and Demantur received a better score for going straight through the puddle. Photo by Conrad Flemming.

horse's feet inside the circle. Stand for five seconds.

**Mythical Creature Crossing:** Ride your horse to the edge of the red path and remain calm during the noisy creature crossing. These mythical creatures were "screaming" Nick Cook riding a pink unicorn stick horse as he was being chased by "roaring" Jackie Alschuler wearing a large dragon hat.

**Troll's Trail:** Navigate your horse through a right-angle turn in the "trash trail," making sure your horse doesn't spook on the paper, balloons, balls, cans, squeakers or other "animals."

**Dragon's Egg Drop:** Receive a spoon and a "dragon's egg" from the judge, hold them in one hand. Navigate your horse with a side pass to the egg carton on the chair. While your horse stands still, carefully place (drop) the egg into its "nest."

The winners of this obstacle competition were awarded a large Icelandic chocolate bar. The participants and the spectators had a lot of fun with the obstacle exercise—and the feedback from the "horses" made it clear that good leadership, simple commands, and precise cues were all that was needed to successfully negotiate a complicated and scary-looking course.

## FOR MORE INFO

These organizations offer competitive trail challenges and other events for trail riders:

The American Competitive Trail Horse Association (ACTHA) offers Competitive Trail Competitions (CTC) and Arena Obstacle Competitions (AOC): [www.actha.us](http://www.actha.us)

The Extreme Cowboy Association (ExCA) offers AOC: [extremecowboyassociation.com](http://extremecowboyassociation.com)

The North American Trail Ride Conference (NATRC) offers Competitive Distance Rides: [natrc.org](http://natrc.org)

The Upper Midwest Endurance & Competitive Rides Association (UMECRA) offers Endurance and Competitive Distance Rides: [www.umecra.com](http://www.umecra.com)

The FOSH Gaited Sport Horse Association offers distance, dressage, and agility trials: [www.fosh.info](http://www.fosh.info)

The Trail Riding Enthusiast Club (TREC USA) offers three-phase events: [trec-usa.org](http://trec-usa.org)

The Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA) offers various equestrian activities that include obstacles: [welcome.sca.org/equestrian](http://welcome.sca.org/equestrian)

Contact Eve and Dave Loftness at [subphreeze@yahoo.com](mailto:subphreeze@yahoo.com) or 651-338-5313.



Eve Loftness and Spyrna frá Reykjavík competing in the same Extreme Cowboy ride. The low calette jump obstacle was scored on willingness and execution. Photo by Conrad Flemming.



# IS YOUR HORSE “OFF”?

BY GLORIA VERRECCHIO

Veterinarian Gloria Verrecchio was originally going to speak at the USIHC Annual Meeting. When a schedule change made that impossible, we asked if she'd instead share her work with USIHC members through the *Quarterly*.

Gloria offers educational seminars and hands-on clinics in Equine Postural Rehabilitation. She received her mixed-practice DVM from the University of Minnesota and her post-graduate Certified Equine Rehabilitation Practitioner (CERP) credentials from the University of Tennessee, and has continued her training by studying with noted rehabilitation educator Kerry Ridgway. She has been riding for more than 30 years “on breeds hot and cold in rings and trails of North America, Europe, and Africa,” as she puts it. For about a decade, she owned an Icelandic horse farm and breeding business in Minnesota with her husband, photographer Vince Verrecchio.

Here is Part One in her “Owner’s Guide to Equine Postural Rehabilitation”:

## WHAT IS YOUR HORSE SAYING?

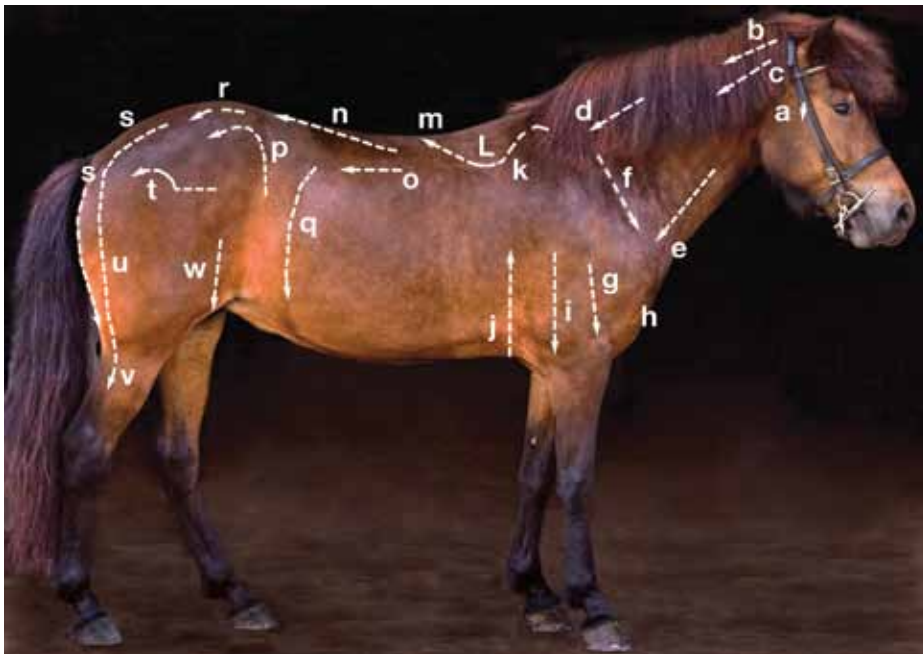
With or without trauma, all horses can suffer from musculoskeletal pain that can impact their disposition and performance. I have two goals for this article. The first is to help you—as an owner, rider, or trainer—more readily see and interpret what your horse is “saying” about pain even when there is no readily observable lameness. The second is to increase your understanding of what can be done to help improve your horse’s mood, motion, and comfort. My underlying assumption is that a comfortable horse is more willing and able to go where and how its rider wants.

Your horse could be exhibiting “bad” behaviors or behavior changes. There may be training issues, a plateau in progress, or reduced performance. There may be observable gait or rhythm disturbances. Typical symptoms of musculoskeletal pain, both obvious and subtle, are:



Gloria Verrecchio, DVM, is an expert on seeing—and explaining—the links between pain and posture in horses. Photo by Vincent Verrecchio, Joyrides Photography.

- Lameness or movement dysfunction
  - Pacey or trotty tölt, rolling in tölt, mixing gaits
  - Unable to trot in one or both directions
  - Refusal to take one canter lead, or cross-canter
  - Cinchy or girthy when saddled
  - Bucking, kicking back, or bolting
  - Changes in posture and/or attitude, fearful or spooky
  - Hesitancy or refusal to perform as usual, e.g., standing still for brushing, holding a gait
  - Moving with hollow topline
  - Crooked topline
  - Inflexibility at the poll
  - One hip higher than the other
  - Bracing on a rein
  - “Just not right”
- These symptoms could result from a number of causes. Typical causes of musculoskeletal issues that affect motion, mood, and comfort are:
- Falling in a pasture, between cross ties, at a jump, on a trail, and elsewhere
  - Slipping (without a fall) on slick or rough terrain, in a trailer, or in an aisle
  - Lengthy trailering
  - Inappropriate saddle fit or shoeing
  - Rough playing, kicking, mounting, or colliding with another horse
  - Prolonged repetitive work



Where does it hurt? Check the following points on your horse by gently palpating or striping over these areas. See the descriptions in the article. Photo by Vincent Verrecchio, Joyrides Photography.

- Riding technique or training exercises inappropriate for fitness level
- Nutritional imbalance and deficiencies
- Aging

Other causes of muscle and joint pain may be due to Lyme disease, infectious or inflammatory conditions, nutritional deficiencies or excesses, or metabolic issues. Please have your horse examined by your veterinarian if you suspect any of these causes.

## POSTURE

It takes an experienced and critical eye to perceive pre-lameness compensations in posture that indicate discomfort or pain. There can be subtle dysfunctional movements, but nothing that would be classified by a veterinarian as “clinically lame.” But you—as an owner, rider, or trainer—can learn to check the muscle groups that are commonly “overworked and tense” and that contribute to your horse’s pain-compensating weight shifts.

Begin with observing your horse’s posture.

In Icelandic horses, there are specific breeding guidelines for conformation, the structure that influences the horse’s functional anatomy or rideability. Instead of structure and anatomy, I think in terms of “posture.” We cannot influence conformation much, once the horse is born, but we can change a horse’s posture to make

the best use of its conformation.

Posture influences how a horse stands, moves, and performs. Poor posture is significantly connected to primary injury and secondary dysfunction over the very wide spectrum from soundness to lameness. A horse may appear sound one day, and then—in the absence of trauma, laminitis, or abscess—appear acutely lame on the next.

Often this acutely lame horse has been sub-clinically lame over several days, or weeks, or months, during which time it has made a cascade of small compensatory changes in posture. The horse will imperceptibly shift its body weight to compensate for the pain. Each postural shift can result in the overloading of another anatomical structure, which in turn becomes painful and results in the horse shifting weight again and again. When the horse is no longer able to disguise its pain and shows clinical lameness, there are multiple compensatory mechanisms and complex areas impacted.

The horse evolved this masking behavior because it is a prey species: It relies on having enough speed to outrun a predator. Predators will select a sick or lame horse as their target to increase their chances of having dinner. Consequently, a horse’s survival depended on its ability to hide pain and weakness using these compensatory movement patterns.

By the time lameness is expressed,

the horse’s pain is significant and may have been so for some time. The longer the horse has been using postural compensations, the greater the likelihood of its having pain in many areas of its body. The presenting lameness may be well separated from the original painful area. Both the lameness and the underlying compensatory mechanisms need to be addressed for healing.

At any point in the pain spectrum, a horse can benefit from Postural Rehabilitation. Importantly, early therapeutic intervention may reduce the risks of further soft tissue or joint damage.

## WHERE DOES IT HURT?

If horses have evolved to hide their pain, how do we determine if and when Postural Rehabilitation is needed? Check the following points on your horse by gently palpating or striping over the areas with a smooth, blunt object held flat against the skin. (I use the plastic end of a Sharpie pen or other pen cap.) Be firm but gentle. If your horse reacts on several touches, there may be a problem. If the reactivity gets worse with successive testing, the likelihood of muscle soreness or an issue being present is increased.

Be careful with your first striping: Very sensitive or painful horses may try to bite or kick. Each area should be palpated several times. Stoic horses may not react, even though the touch is painful, until it is repeated several times. Very sensitive horses may react just because they are sensitive to touch. If you stripe too hard, even non-painful horses will react.

In the accompanying photo, the 23 areas to test are labeled A to W. When testing each of these areas for reactivity, start at the beginning of the line and stripe in the direction of the arrow.

- The temporomandibular joint (TMJ): Use your fingers to gently palpate the TMJ just behind the eye. Use your fingertip to lightly stripe a vertical line down from the center of the joint toward the cheek. About an inch below the joint you will find a small depression. Gently stripe across this point to determine reactivity. Your horse may be sensitive on one or both sides if there is TMJ pain.
- The poll muscles, just behind the ears.
- The oblique muscles of the upper neck



- are associated with the flexion, extension, and rotational movements of the head. Tension in the jaws and/or in the lower back can create tension in these muscles, which in turn can prevent the correct use of the back and pelvic muscles.
- d. The cervical portion of the trapezius and rhomboid muscles in front of the withers elevate and move the scapula forward as the leg moves back and under the horse. These muscles, when overused, become overdeveloped, and the horse becomes unbalanced, heavy on the forehand, and often leans on the bit and exhibits “no brakes.”
  - e, f. These muscles at the base of the neck suspend the trunk, stabilize the shoulder, attach shoulder blades, and allow the chest to move between the two scapulas. Muscle pain or tension contributes to tight shoulders, restricted movement, forehand stiffness, poor coordination, and low-neck pain. Freely moving shoulders allow for long strides in all gaits and a higher leg lift in tölt.
  - g. The muscles at and behind the shoulder joint.
  - h. The biceps on the front of the chest and the adjacent pectoral muscles next to the sternum. Open your hand to wrap your fingers and thumb around the area just below the point of the shoulder and squeeze gently.
  - i. The triceps and other shoulder flexors work together to flex and extend the shoulder joint and the elbow. Pain and tension in these muscles place additional stress on the muscles of the leg and the tendons in the lower leg.
  - j. The ascending pectorals: Reach under the chest behind the elbow and gently stripe upwards behind the shoulder.
  - k. The saddle-fitting point.
  - L. The rear portion of the withers and the pocket of the withers (the thoracic trapezius), and the shelf of ribs at the scapula intersection.
  - m. The rider seat area: Poorly fitting saddles or unbalanced riders contribute to muscle damage and atrophy.
  - n. The multifida muscles are small muscles that connect the spinal segments and the overlying back muscles. The multifida are responsible for the

fine motor coordination of movement and for cervical and spinal stabilization. The overlying back muscles (epaxial) stabilize the spine and help transfer the power created in the hindquarters through the back to the front of the horse. When lower back pain blocks this energy flow, the horse begins to use its front limbs to pull rather than its hind legs to push.

- o. The muscle group on the underside of the rump and the spinal column connects the pelvis to the lower back and the ribs; it is an important connection, allowing energy transfer from back to front. This muscle inserts at the rib shelf of the last three to four ribs.
- p. The transverse abdominal muscle and the other hip flexors attach here to the pelvis. Contraction of these abdominal muscles produces flexion in the lumbosacral joint, allowing the hind limb to come further under the horse.
- q. The last rib.  
Pain found in any one of the next muscle groups (letters R to W) results in a shorter step length and a resistance to lateral movements.
- r. The middle gluteal and superficial gluteal muscles.
- s. The dorsal edge of the biceps femoris and the hamstring muscles.
- t. The muscle attachments at the hip joint.
- u. Segments of the biceps femoris.
- v. The superficial digital flexor and the gastrocnemius muscles.
- w. The stifle joint muscle attachments.

## IMPROVING MOTION, MOOD, AND COMFORT

My second goal for this article is to help you—as an owner, rider, or trainer—understand what can be done if areas of your horse are consistently painful. Chronic discomfort or pain may indicate subclinical musculoskeletal problems that need to be professionally assessed to determine what treatment(s) would be most effective to help improve your horse’s mood, motion, and comfort.

If you decide to contact an equine rehabilitation veterinarian, expect your horse to be palpated, flexed, walked and trotted on a lead line, and lunged to determine its pain points, balance, straight-

ness, range of motion, and biomechanical dysfunction. Specialized palpation and diagnostic acupuncture and acupuncture may be used to identify muscle or myofascial tension and pain in the head, neck, back, and other areas. Limb and spinal mobilization can help determine restriction and laxity. Depending on your horse’s condition, you may be asked to ride and demonstrate the problem(s) under saddle. Saddle fit may be checked for pressure points.

If treatment is indicated, a portfolio of therapies are available that draw on traditional and complementary alternative medicine. These could include the manual release of muscle and myofascial tightness and restriction, acupuncture with laser or traditional needles, therapeutic stretches and flexion from jaws and neck to tail, and more.

The following 3-F Follow-up Plan can help maintain the therapeutic results:

**Feet:** Your horse can achieve straightness and correct posture only with correctly trimmed and balanced hooves.

**Food:** Your horse’s diet needs to be balanced to meet not only caloric requirements for energy but also to provide adequate vitamins and minerals to support metabolic function and to build and repair bone, muscle, and other soft tissues.

**Flexercise:** Your horse needs to be equally strong on both sides of its body. Postural Rehabilitation can straighten a crooked horse with a variety of exercises. Some are active (baited) and passive stretches performed in hand. Some incorporate such props as ground poles, cavalletti, and labyrinths. All are designed to improve your horse’s core strength, flexibility, and suppleness. Other exercises are designed to improve its proprioception and surefootedness. Mounted exercises can improve cardiovascular fitness and endurance.

Part Two of this article, to be published in an upcoming issue of the *Quarterly*, will explain and show photographically a variety of flexercises that you can perform on your own.

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# “LET’S TALK ABOUT TEETH”

BY NANCY MARIE BROWN

Laurelyn Keener, DVM, the final presenter at this year’s USIHC Annual Meeting, is one of the premier equine veterinary dentists in the country, according to Kydee Sheetz, who introduced her. Laurelyn works on the teeth of most of the Icelandic horses in Minnesota—and rides in the Flugnir Drill Team.

“A horse’s teeth are really cool,” she began. “I could talk about them all day.” Yet in a half-hour of well-organized slides and some show-and-tell with a complete horse skull, she was able to convey a lot of fun facts—and a few things we should worry about.

## THE HORSE’S MOUTH

An adult horse can have between 36 and 44 teeth. To describe them, equine dentists divide a horse’s mouth into four quadrants: top jaw, bottom jaw, left side, and right side. Moving from the front of the horse’s mouth to the back, each quadrant will have three incisors (12 total). Horses use their incisors to grasp and snip off grass stems when grazing—and sometimes to nip their pasture mates or us.

Next, some horses will have one canine tooth in each quadrant. Usually these horses are male; only a third of mares have canines, usually small ones, though Icelandics are one of the few breeds in which the mares usually do have canine teeth. Also called tushes, or tush teeth, the canines don’t help the horses eat. But neither do they generally cause problems with the bit.

The teeth that are problematic are the wolf teeth. These sit behind the canines, right in front of the premolars. A horse may or may not have one of these small teeth in each quadrant of its mouth. “It’s rare to see a horse with four wolf teeth,” Laurelyn said. It’s estimated up to 75 percent of horses, male and female, will have at least one. Unlike canines, which are easy to see, “you have to really look for the wolf teeth. They tend to cause problems with the bit because wolf teeth have small roots. They can become wiggly, and that’s irritating,” she explained. Wolf teeth aren’t always visible—even to an equine dentist, who may,

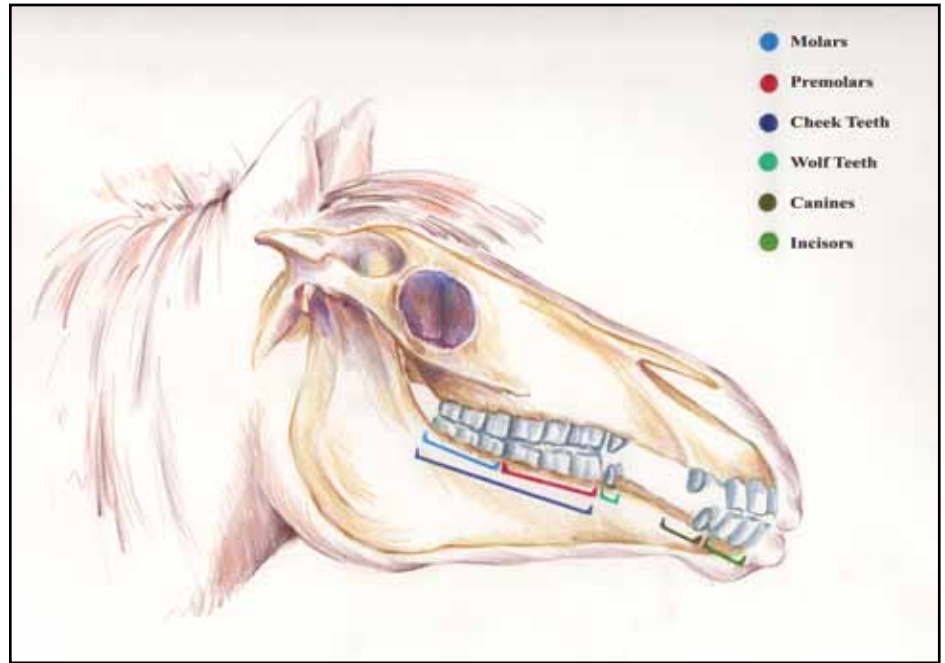


Illustration by Nancy Wines-Dewan.

however, be able to feel them beneath the gum. Even these invisible wolf teeth can be problematic. “If they don’t erupt, they can press on the bit and make the horse a head-tosser or just more reactive to the bit.

“Usually in the U.S. we take these teeth out when the horse is young,” Laurelyn explained. When vets lay a colt down for gelding, they’ll often pull the wolf teeth at the same time. This practice, however, means that mares’ wolf teeth are usually not noticed until they cause problems if no one examines the mare’s mouths.

Finally, in the back of the mouth are the “cheek teeth or the chewing teeth.” An adult horse will have three premolars and three molars in each quadrant (24 teeth in all). These are the most important teeth. A horse can live without its incisors. But without molars to grind its food, the horse can starve.

## TEETHING PAINS

Like humans, horses start with baby teeth (24 to 28 total), which are replaced by adult teeth. A foal starts losing its baby teeth at a year old, but it will not have all its adult teeth until it is between four and a half and six years old. This fact, Laure-

lyn said, should make us stop and think: “All horses are teething at the same time as they are learning their jobs.”

If you’ve had children, you know what teething pain does to the attention span. Young horses are not all that different, in this way, from young humans.

For this and other reasons, the trainers in the Spanish Riding School don’t begin training a horse until after it gets all its teeth. In South America, “The *vaqueros* will use a bosal, not a bit, until teething is over,” Laurelyn said.

Even Icelandic horses that are generally not trained until they are four or five can still be too young to comfortably learn to accept the bit if they are slow in developing their adult teeth.

## FLOATING

Another problem we need to be aware of are points—why they form on the teeth and how to avoid them.

Points are sharp protrusions that can cause sores on the horse’s tongue or, more often, the insides of its cheeks. Some horses have more of a problem with developing points, some less. Why? Points are caused by the horses’ natural chewing



method—but they can be exacerbated by how we feed them.

“Horses chew side to side,” Laurelyn explained. She showed a video of a horse chewing, coming closer and closer, its jaws swinging widely from left to right and right to left as the horse—undoubtedly an Icelandic—tried to press its lips against the camera lens. “If you ever have a bad day and need a laugh,” Laurelyn noted, “just try to get that video of your horse eating hay. You’ll be rolling on the ground!”

That natural side-to-side swinging motion is greatest when the horse is chewing the long-stemmed grasses it evolved to eat. “The range of motion is somewhat less for hay, and very limited for grain,” Laurelyn said. This fact is important to know because, “as horses grind their food, they are actually grinding down their teeth. They wear away 2 millimeters of tooth a year, on average.”

The teeth are very dynamic. Demonstrating with the horse’s skull, Laurelyn showed how the roots of the long molars stretch way up into a young horse’s sinuses. Over time, as the horse eats and grinds away its teeth (making them shorter and shorter), the tooth is pushed down out of the upper jawbone (or up out of the lower jawbone). The nerves and blood vessels in the tooth retract, and lay down more dentin to form a barrier between themselves and the chewing surface.

“Because the teeth are always being ground away, any part of the tooth that is not in touch with another tooth will get long—or tall.” These parts of the tooth—erupting, but not being ground away—will develop into the sharp points that cause sores on the cheeks and tongue.

Why would the horse’s upper and lower teeth not touch? Again, it’s a natural function of the way horses chew. Detaching the two jaws of the skull, Laurelyn showed us that the upper jaw is wider than the lower jaw. When the horse’s jaw is at rest, “the upper teeth on the outside don’t touch the lower teeth, while the lower teeth on the inside don’t touch the upper teeth.” Only if the horse routinely grazes on long-stemmed grass—with its head down and swinging its jaws side to side in long strokes—will these inner and outer tooth edges touch often enough to be normally ground away (though the edges will still get sharp).

“A horse chewing grass is not likely to get big points,” Laurelyn said.

If, instead, your horse is only chewing



Laurelyn Keener, with her non-Icelandic friend, Elmer.

grain, however, it will get them. “Chewing grain, a horse is not making long strokes, it’s mashing.”

Having its head down close to the ground while it eats is also a factor in developing points. When the horse lowers its head, its bottom jaw is thrust forward and its teeth meet properly together. If a horse routinely eats hay from a manger or a hay net, without its head lowered, its teeth don’t line up correctly front to back, leading to problems that in the long run may limit the range of motion.

A horse’s tongue is tougher than its cheek tissue, so equine dentists “see more cheek trauma than tongue trauma,” Laurelyn explained. “Removal of the sharp points allows the cheek tissue to heal.”

Removing the points is called “floating” the teeth—“the term comes from carpentry—it means to make something smooth.” But the purpose of floating the teeth is not to make all the tooth surfaces smooth, only to remove the sharp points. “We don’t touch the chewing surfaces of normal teeth.”

A working horse, on average, needs to have its teeth floated every year, Laurelyn recommended. Younger horses may need to be looked at as often as every three to six months, because the teeth are softer in younger horses and therefore develop sharp edges more quickly than in older horses with harder teeth.

Why don’t wild horses need to have their teeth floated? The same reason, in general, that they don’t need to have their hooves trimmed. “Their teeth may not be beautiful, but they’re functional. The horse is always grazing, with its head down, chewing long-stemmed grasses, swinging its jaw in long strokes side to

side. It doesn’t wear a bit or bridle, nor is it expected to live to thirty.” Those are the conditions needed to avoid having problems with sharp teeth or points. Unless we’re keeping our horses in a totally natural way, we should be checking and, as often as necessary, floating their teeth.

## THE GIFT HORSE

Should you look a gift horse in the mouth? “Absolutely”, Laurelyn said—but not to learn how old it is.

The fact that a horse’s teeth are constantly growing—and being ground away—also means that, eventually, an old horse will run out of teeth. As the roots get shorter, the angle of the teeth will change, changing the shape of the horse’s jaw and making the horse look “long in the tooth.”

But the idea that you can easily tell a horse’s age by looking at its teeth is a myth. Each expert, and each handbook, Laurelyn noted, seems to have his or her own system. “Aging teeth is not very precise. It varies by breed and diet—and vices like cribbing also play a role.”

But looking a gift horse—or any horse—in the mouth every year is an important part of being a conscientious horse owner. Problems with their teeth can turn good horses into dangerous ones, if pain keeps the horse from being able to understand and respond to cues from the bit, and healthy horses into thin and unhappy ones, if it’s painful to chew. Good teeth are as important to horses as good feet.

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Photo by Nancy Marie Brown.

# EAT LIKE A HORSE

BY ANNIE ASTON



Gerpir II from Fitjamyri “grazing” his Hay Pillow. Says Annie, “Normally I clip the Hay Pillow inside of a tall-sided empty water trough with the bottom plug removed for drainage. He has shoes on and he can hurt himself or rip the netting by pawing at it with shoes. The Hay Pillow is designed for bare-foot horses. I took the photo with the Hay Pillow outside of the tub for visual purposes.” Photo by Annie Aston.

**D**oes your horse have a Jekyll and Hyde personality? Sometimes you go out for a ride and the horse is a dream to work with, yet other times he seems to be a ticking time bomb waiting to go off at the slightest provocation. Have you ever wondered what could be the cause of this apparent split personality?

As I learned when taking an equine behavior course at the University of Guelph in Canada, many factors can play into the development of heightened reactivity, anxiety, stress, and excitability responses in horses. Some examples are poor training practices, a breakdown in the human-horse partnership, neurological issues, pain due to ill-fitting tack, and many more.

However, the most common cause of abnormal behavior in horses comes from a lack of the five freedoms. These can be defined as:

- freedom from thirst, hunger, and malnutrition

- freedom from physical and thermal discomfort
- freedom from pain, injury, and disease
- freedom to express most patterns of normal behavior
- freedom from fear and distress.

Because my own horse was demonstrating problematic behaviors related to stress and reactivity, I made it my mission to grant him the five freedoms as best I could. Due to his heightened reactivity and excitability, specifically when under saddle, my first instinct led me to believe the problem was ill-fitting tack. After spending quite a bit of time and money investing in better-fitting tack, I found there was some improvement, but not as much as I had hoped. It was clear that I did not see the whole picture. There was something else at play, and I was determined to figure out what it was.

## DIET AND STRESS

In Guelph’s equine nutrition course, I learned how diet can influence excitability

and reactivity in horses, and what nutritional interventions are effective.

Clinical signs of excitability, reactivity, or stress in horses can vary substantially. Primary signs can include a heightened fear of novel stimuli and an exaggerated fear response in everyday situations. Other behavioral signs are increased emotionality; heightened reactivity; increased fight, flight or freeze responses; hyperactivity; unwillingness to work; or the appearance of being tense or wound up during routine work. In some situations, cribbing, weaving, or stall walking can also indicate chronic stress.

Every now and then, you hear of a horse described as “the perfect horse” until something sets him off that is not yet identified by the handler or trainer. When interpreting this change in behavior, it’s easy to attribute it to a deficit of learning ability in the horse, not realizing that the horse’s learning ability may in fact be profoundly influenced by what he eats. Nutrition can have a huge impact on a horse’s emotionality due to his sensitive digestive tract.



## SUGAR AND STARCH

A common misconception is that excess protein causes a horse to get “hot.” This is not true. If your horse is reacting to a new feed by becoming excitable, it is likely due to the higher energy content of the feed, rather than the higher protein level. A horse will dispose of excess protein either in his urine, evidenced by a strong ammonia smell, or in his sweat, characterized by a thick, white soapy lather. (Note that thick lathery sweat is inefficient at cooling a horse during intense exercise, and this contributes to the risk of overheating.)

Excess carbohydrates—sugars and starches—are the real reason feeds cause a horse to be reactive. During digestion, carbohydrates are converted to glucose, which is then absorbed into the blood, increasing the blood sugar level. Human studies have shown a link between high blood sugar levels, mood swings, and hyperactivity. In horses, unstable blood sugar levels could very well be a cause of heightened reactivity and those Jekyll and Hyde-type mood swings.

A simple solution to decrease the excitability of your horse is to use feeds that are lower in carbohydrates. Researchers have reported that a decrease in the amount of dietary starch consumption is directly associated with a decrease in the level of excitability.

An effective method for decreasing carbohydrates is to first seek out feeds that have little to no molasses. Molasses is a simple sugar that can have some benefits when present in feedstuffs; however, when trying to reduce consumption of carbohydrates, it is best avoided. Another step that can be taken to reduce starches in feed is to replace any cereal grains such as oats, barley, or corn with a highly digestible un-molassed fiber beet pulp. Beet pulp is equally high in digestible energy, without the starch content.

## SUPPLEMENTS

Various calming supplements designed for horses can be found on the market today. Most contain one or all of the following: magnesium, the B-vitamin thiamin, and herbal sedatives such as valerian and tryptophan.

It is well known that a severe magnesium deficiency can cause general nervousness and excitability in horses. However, this is highly unlikely to be the cause of

the problem for most horses, due to large amounts of magnesium generally found in grass, hay, and grains. If you suspect your horse has a magnesium deficiency, it can be confirmed through diagnostic testing by your veterinarian.

There is anecdotal evidence that large doses of thiamin might decrease anxiety and excitability in nervous horses. Thiamin deficiency is known to cause problems with brain function and in extreme cases can lead to convulsions. Thiamin is safe, and as an added benefit it can stimulate the appetite of picky eaters. That said, there is no empirical evidence that thiamin has any calming effect on the nervous system of horses.

As for herbal remedies, there is a reasonable amount of scientific evidence to suggest the calming effect of valerian, however there are currently no published studies of that effect on horses. Horse owners should also be aware that valerian is on the prohibited substances list of the International Federation for Equestrian Sports (FEI).

In controlled studies with horses, tryptophan has been found to be extremely effective in treating cribbing, weaving, and stall walking. However, before running to the store to purchase supplements, keep in mind that grass hay is naturally high in tryptophan. Prior to supplementing your nervous, hot, or excitable horse with an herbal calmer, you should assess his diet. Some minor adjustments in feeding or activity level might make all the difference.

Unfortunately, in this country the prevailing sentiment of horse owners often is, “if a little is good, a lot must be better,” and we often feed too many supplements. Supplements, or nutraceuticals, are not regulated by the government. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) only regulates a product if it is classified as a food or drug, and nutraceuticals fall somewhere in-between. The majority of nutraceuticals have not been studied for safety or efficacy. Anyone who looks in a horse catalogue is exposed to hundreds of products with broad claims based on little or no science, so how do we know that what we are feeding our horse is safe? As a responsible horse owner, you must be cautious when choosing products, as over-supplementation can cause nervousness or heightened reactivity in horses due to specific mineral or vitamin toxicities



Two horses nicely sharing a Nibble Net slow feeder, hung low to let them eat in a natural position. Photo by Nicki Esdorn.

or deficiencies. Keep in mind that when a horse’s body is assaulted by too much of a good thing, it doesn’t know how to respond, and sometimes this can compromise his immune system. It is wise to always have your hay analyzed and to speak with your veterinarian or an equine nutritionist prior to adding any supplements to your horse’s daily feeding regime.

## ULCERS

Often the cause of heightened reactivity lies not in what our horses eat, but how they eat. In the typical stable today, most horses are only fed twice a day. This is not ideal. Horses continuously produce stomach acid (up to nine gallons of stomach acid per day) regardless of whether or not they are eating. When horses are fed twice a day, it creates a gorging and fasting situation. Because horses have a very small stomach that evolved for trickle feeding (consuming small amounts of forage throughout the entire day), this pattern of gorging and fasting can cause stomach burning due to the acid splash effect. This can lead to gastric ulcers, which are extremely painful and notorious for causing behavioral changes in horses.

In the case of my personal horse, I observed a clear Jekyll and Hyde effect associated with eating. He would be calm and easy after a meal, when his stomach was full. However, he would become highly nervous and excitable when his stomach

was empty, a few hours after eating. Based on his symptoms and the fact that more than 80 percent of performance horses suffer from some varying degree of ulceration, I had reason to believe that my horse was suffering from ulcers.

Gastric ulcers can be confirmed by a veterinarian performing an endoscopy. This is a procedure that allows the vet to see inside the horse's stomach via a tiny camera attached to a long, thin tube that is inserted through the nostril into the esophagus and down into the stomach. This procedure is not without risks, as it can be stressful for a horse, which can aggravate existing ulcers, or even cause an ulcer where there wasn't one previously.

If you suspect your horse might suffer from ulcers, there are several things you can do to help them heal. A supplement called Egusin has been tested by the Veterinary School of the Louisiana State University and it has been shown to help heal and prevent gastric ulcers in horses. Horses can also be treated for ulcers through a medication approved by the FDA called GastroGard. GastroGard is known to reverse ulcers and prevent them from recurring even while the horse is still in training. Talk to your veterinarian about these two products.

Treatment with Egusin or GastroGard can be expensive, so you may first want to change your horse's feeding routine. One approach is to replace your grain with a forage balancer. This is a small quantity of grain that is very low in carbohydrates, while still containing all the protein, vitamins, and minerals a horse requires within the small ration. No extra supplements are needed.

Introducing some alfalfa (hay, pellets, or cubes) into your horse's diet might also help, but due to its high protein and calorie content, alfalfa should be used in moderation or not at all if a horse is overweight. The high calcium content of alfalfa hay acts as a buffer on stomach acid, which helps reduce the incidence and severity of gastric ulcers.

With Icelandics, too much weight gain is a common issue. I can offer an example of what I do for my personal horse: I feed him grass hay for his normal rations and only a small amount of alfalfa 30 minutes prior to riding or trailering. This significantly reduces the acidity of the stomach, limiting the acid-splash effect. When stomach acid splashes within an empty stomach

during fast movement, especially trotting and cantering, the horse can experience excruciating pain as well as develop more ulcers. For horses that can't have alfalfa, even feeding just a handful or two of grass hay during grooming just prior to riding can help.

## TRICKLE FEEDING

The approach I took was to encourage trickle feeding. The theory is that if the stomach is never empty, then ulcers have a minimal chance of forming. When viewing this from an evolutionary perspective, a horse in the wild rarely ever fasts for more than 3-4 hours, yet in a stable they are often forced to fast for 8-16 hours!

There are various types of slow feeders on the market. My personal favorite is called The Hay Pillow®. It is positioned on the ground as if a horse were grazing, which promotes natural dental wear and prevents respiratory issues by allowing the sinuses to drain out and down as nature intended.

Continual access to forage through trickle feeding supports the five freedoms:

- freedom from hunger: he slowly and constantly eats
- freedom from physical discomfort: his stomach is never empty
- freedom from pain and disease: no more ulcers
- freedom to express normal behavior: increased chew time

- freedom from distress: no anxiety caused by fasting.

I have had an incredible experience utilizing this slow feeder with my personal horse. He went from being fed timothy grass hay twice a day to receiving a Hay Pillow filled with timothy grass twice a day. This leveled out the consumption of his daily calories considerably, and he is rarely without food for more than a few hours at a time. Due to the natural trickle feeding effect, he no longer has a hay belly caused by gorging and overloading the hindgut fermentation. Amazingly, a few days after I switched to the slow feeder, his Jekyll and Hyde behavior response disappeared completely.

I am aware, as Becky Hothershall and her colleagues write in their article "Role of Diet and Feeding in Normal and Stereotypic Behaviors in Horses" (*Veterinary Clinics of North America: Equine*, volume 25 (2009)), that "behavioral changes associated with diet are likely to be confounded by frustration, excess energy reserves, or lack of stimulation." I am aware of the possibility that my horse does not have ulcers, and it was merely the increased chew time and mental stimulation of trickle feeding that caused this sudden change in his behavior. Regardless, all that truly matters is that my horse is comfortable and happy.

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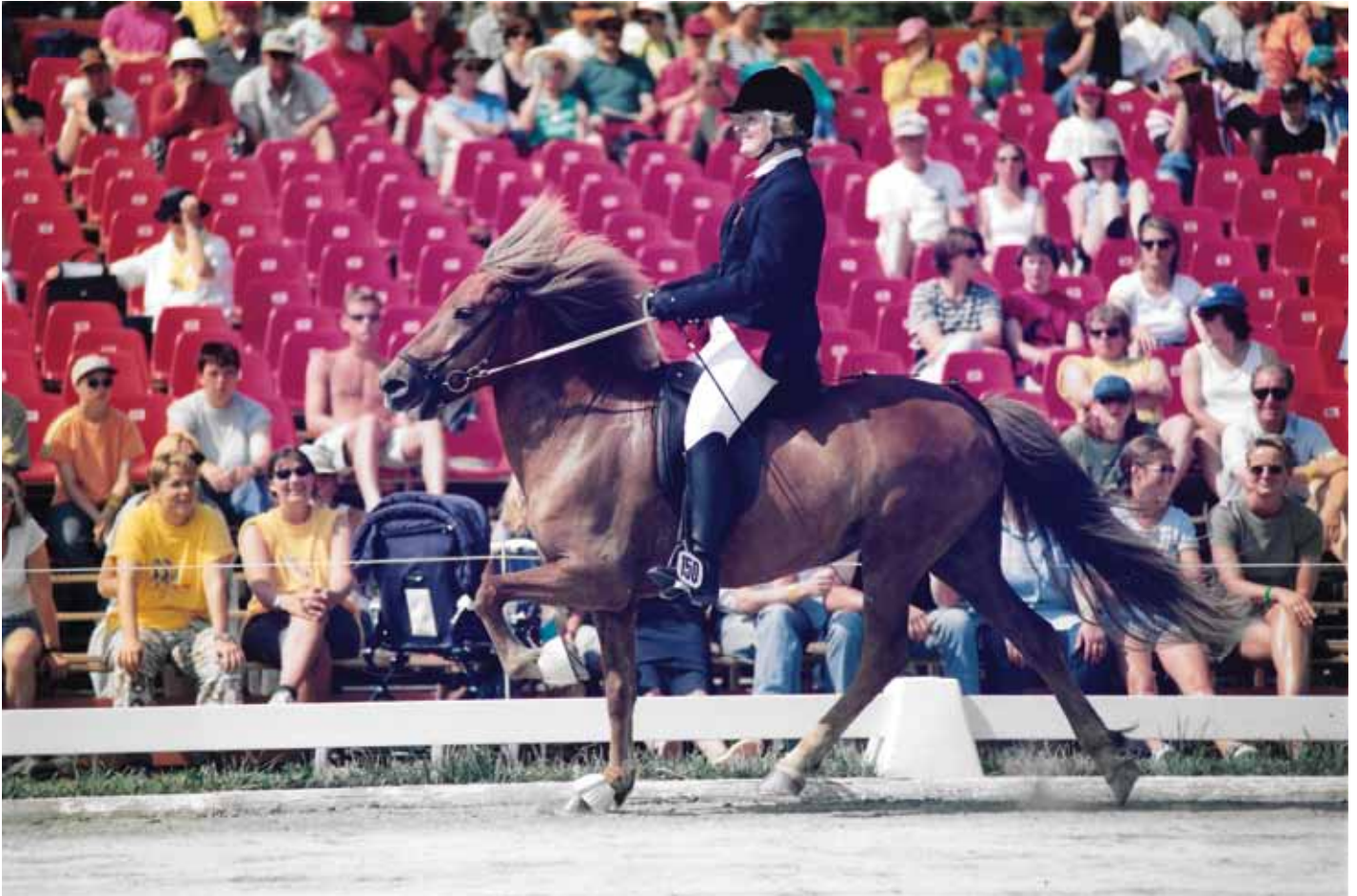


Annie Aston riding Gerpir II from Fitjamyri in the Kraftur Spring Show in April, where they received first place in Green Horse Four Gait. Photo by Alexandra Venable.



# THE FEAR OF RIDING

BY THERESA J. JORDAN



In 1999, Terry Jordan competed on Eldbrá von Wiesenhof at the Icelandic Horse World Championships. When she first rode her, however, Eldbrá's large movements surprised and scared Terry so much that she forgot to breathe.

To feel fears and anxieties is to be mortal. Without fears, we would not survive.

Infants show a “reflex” known as the Babinski response when they feel they are falling or being dropped—they throw their arms out to the sides as though to brace or to grab for security. They also show a fear of what adults call “heights.” When placed in an experimental playpen constructed with a half glass floor, giving the appearance of being a kind of cliff, infants stop at the false drop off and avoid that area of play.

When we are riding, even on our comparatively short Icelandic horses, we are up high. Simply being up high is a natural, inborn trigger for fear. Fear of falling is one of those inborn fears that help keep us safe.

Fears are universal. It is remarkable, then, that so many, if not all, riders feel embarrassed about their fears of riding.

I am a clinical psychologist and a rider. The purpose of this first in a series of articles for the *Quarterly* on the psychology of riding is to focus on the kinds of fears and anxieties horse people experience. Following articles will explore ways of coping with our fears, including differences of opinion about what works best to eliminate our fears while still retaining those fears that keep us as safe as possible.

Many riders experience discomforting emotions that interfere with their enjoyment of a sport that could otherwise bring them enormous pleasure. Knowing why we feel these fears and anxieties can take us a long way toward changing our behaviors and alleviating our troubling

emotions. From a psychological perspective, fears and anxieties overlap, with one difference being that we typically experience anxiety in anticipation of an event (such as riding), while fears occur in the presence of an event or feared object (such as being with or on the horse.) These issues can become quite complex. In this article, I will focus on phobias, “good” fears, and trauma-induced anxiety.

As we traverse the landscape of fears and anxieties, it's important always to take our time with ourselves, something I like to think of as self-patience. Take the time that is necessary: Learn to be kind and patient with ourselves just as we are kind and patient with our horses, because unlearning typically takes longer than learning! While learning fear can be a one-shot deal, like falling off the first time, taming



Terry Jordan recently bought Maistjarna from Flying C Icelandics, after several years riding an 18-hand warmblood. Riding a five-gaited Icelandic can be far more complex, she says.

that fear is likely to take much more time and effort.

## RIDING ICELANDICS

Because Icelandic horses are smaller than many other breeds, some riders question why anyone would be fearful of riding them, especially given their colorful reputation for being “bombproof.” Our friends who ride “big horses” typically fail to recognize that four- and five-gaited Icelandics can be far more complex to ride than even an 18-hand warmblood trained for dressage.

With Icelandic horses, very subtle differences in the rider’s posture, balance, and leg position can result in jet-like take-offs, and the signals to stop traditionally used on a non-gaited horse can easily be misinterpreted by our Icelandic horses as a request to transition from a gallop to a flying pace, or from a trot to a fast tölt or gallop. With Icelandic horses, smaller certainly does not mean easier, and while Icelandics can be amazingly safe and fearless on trails or even in a large and noisy show ring; they also are amazingly sensitive to what we, their riders, are feeling. For this reason, learning to understand and cope

with our own emotions can be crucial to safe and pleasurable rides.

When I first was learning to ride the very large Icelandic mare named Eldbrá, who would become my World Championship mount, I was surprised and scared by her very large movement. I was trying to sit her big tölt on the oval track at Der Wiesenhof, Germany, but making a terrible mess of it. After having a good laugh, my trainer, Dani Gehmacher, told

Learn to be kind and patient  
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with our horses.

me that my major problem was that I was holding my breath and Eldbrá could not figure out what was wrong!

Yes, I was holding my breath because I was scared witless of her power and of the very different sense of tölt I was getting on this incredibly strong and fit horse who was trying so hard to please me.

I was shocked that my horse could

actually feel my breathing (or lack of it), and was trying to do the right thing so that I would be what she knew as “normal.” When I’ve held my breath on my huge Swedish warmblood, she doesn’t seem to care, as long as I don’t pinch her with tense thighs. While there is likely a huge difference from one horse to another within any breed, after decades of riding Icelandics, I am convinced that they are far more sensitive than many others to our emotions.

## PHOBIAS

Behavioral psychologists view phobias as the discomfort that initially arises from a small kernel of fear, and expands outward until it reaches dramatically broad proportions.

In an interview with a well known Western rider and trainer, I asked him to tell me about the fears he sees in his students. He told me a story that beautifully illustrates how a phobia can interfere with the pleasure of being with horses.

A woman who held a very stressful, very responsible professional position had always dreamed of owning her own horse. She had envisioned for years how being away from work and at a barn would do wonders to relieve her work-related stress. She finally bought a well-trained, healthy quarterhorse and boarded him at a barn where his basic needs were met. After owning her gelding for nearly a year, she called upon the expert horseman because of intractable problems with her horse.

The problems had begun when, after work each day, she changed clothes and drove to the barn to visit her long-awaited equine. She began to have trouble catching him to put on his halter. When he wheeled around and ran from her, she became fearful of his speed and power. The expert gave her some of the time-honored hints for catching her horse, such as dropping the halter around his feed bucket and raising it as he dipped his head for the treats she brought each day. Regardless of the hints and help, this owner began to feel more and more anxious. She realized that the process of changing clothes to go to the barn had become very anxiety provoking, instead of being filled with the anticipation of pleasure. The drive to the barn became a miserable experience, and going into the paddock an experience of sheer ter-



ror. Everything associated with the idea of catching her horse to ride him had become a source of misery.

Finally, after working with her expert unsuccessfully for months, she asked him a simple question: “Do I have to ride him?” The expert’s initial thought was to say, of course—why else did you buy a horse? But then he gave himself a night to think it over. The next day, he asked his desperate student: “What is it about horses that gave you pleasure in the beginning?” Her answer simply was: “To go to the barn, feed him, and watch him eat.” So his response was: “Then go right ahead, give up the catching and the riding, and just watch him eat.”

This horse owner was experiencing a phobic response to anything equine, and her wise trainer recognized the issue to be beyond the realm of his expertise. If she truly wished to work on eliminating her phobia, she would need a different kind of expertise, but in the meanwhile if her pleasure came simply from feeding her otherwise happy and healthy horse, that was where she should stop. There were plenty of willing and able riders at her barn who were very pleased to exercise her horse, and she was able to return to her happy, stress-relieving trips to the barn.

Phobias are problems best worked through with a mental health professional who can apply behavioral and cognitive-behavioral techniques. Forcing yourself to keep doing what makes you feel terrible amounts at best to practicing feeling awful—and strengthening the phobia at worst.

## “GOOD” FEARS

We are born with our brains wired to experience fears. Fearing things that are large, powerful, fast, and have minds of their own makes good sense. The horses we love do, in fact, fall into this category. Our task as riders, as well as that of other horse professionals such as farriers, is to determine what is reasonable and acceptable risk versus what is beyond what we should be risking.

When we have trouble discerning which is which, we should consult horse experts and/or cognitive behavioral therapists who can help us determine whether we should go ahead and attempt our goals or set them aside as too risky.

Some years ago, an acquaintance of mine traveled to Iceland on a horse-riding

and horse-buying expedition. He had ridden Icelandic horses, but certainly not at the level of an expert. While in Iceland, he visited a farm where he saw a stallion who caught his eye but was not for sale. He asked to ride the magnificent animal, but was told absolutely not. He argued. He was told that this stallion had numerous nicknames, including what in English would amount to “devil,” and some others unfit to print in our *Quarterly*. Even the best Icelandic riders on the farm would no longer ride this horse, and were puzzled about what to do with him.

After interminable arguing, the Icelanders finally gave in to the American. He managed to mount the “devil horse” and within a very short time had suffered many broken bones and a wealth

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of serious bruises, but—thankfully—had survived being dumped and dragged until the horse was quite finished with him. He flew home with an abundance of casts and purple with black eyes.

Even Icelandic horses can pose dangers, for a wide range of reasons. Riding an Icelandic when the horse has not yet been well trained, or the rider has not yet learned to ride the gaits, can cause all sorts of troubles. Ignoring the warnings of experts, even if you’ve reached the level of expert rider yourself, is a foolish and dangerous choice to make!

On the other hand, what scares us can often be comparatively safe. On one of my training trips to Europe to ride my Eldbrá, the trails were mostly covered in ice, given that I had only been able to capture some free time from my professorship during our January break. I had become quite proficient on Eldbrá, who was already amazingly caring and protective of me. If she felt my balance shifting too far forward, she managed to maneuver me back into a safe position. Like many riders coming from an American hunt-seat tradition, my “safety zone”

seemed always to be pitched forward into a half seat—a position very likely to trigger speed (and a lack of safety) on an Icelandic horse.

My trainer took me out to practice a fast canter on the trails, given that Eldbrá had been shod with studs to make her footing safer on ice. Going uphill was fine and felt great to me—but downhill cantering at high speed was very scary! My trainer said that if I didn’t pick up a fast canter, she would chase me with a dressage whip until I got there. I was terrified that Eldbrá would fall—I was as frightened for my beautiful and much-loved horse as I was for myself. As it turned out, Eldbrá could race downhill on ice as securely as uphill, as long as I made my body do what my trainer insisted—that I sit deep and not permit myself to pitch forward, which certainly would have been dangerous! Perhaps it was my deep love of my horse that enabled me to do the “mind over matter” thing and force my butt down onto the saddle. It was, however, my total trust in my trainer—an incredibly important factor in learning to ride well and safely—that enabled me to stop thinking that what she was demanding was crazy!

The major point of these two tales is that there are kinds of fear that are good: They are present within us to keep us from harm, or at least to minimize our risks.

Remember, always, that no matter how good the horse and how trusted and competent the trainer, if we feel too terrified to make our bodies do what will be safe for our riding, it is best to wait for another day! That will best ensure that we will be able to ride another day.

Riding terrified often makes riders “practice” riding in great fear—not something we should be teaching ourselves, or strengthening in our emotions. If we are having difficulty trying to figure out what is a “good” fear and what is irrational, it is time to consult an expert who can help us tease apart the difference.

Finally, learning and practicing self-patience is a crucial emotional tool, something that will be discussed in detail in the second article in this series.

## TRAUMATIC ANXIETIES

All riders will remember falling off or viewing another rider fall off and being told by their trainer that they must get back on

immediately! Falling is one of those things that we humans are born “wired” to avoid, so it is understandable that falling from a horse is very likely to be traumatic.

A traumatic experience causes such reactions as heightened blood pressure, racing heart, shallow and/or speeded breathing, as well as sweating, trembling, and a feeling of shock. Even if no obvious physical injuries have been sustained, psychological injuries are present nevertheless. These psychological injuries might be very minor and short term, similar to bumps and bruises. On the other hand, the psychological responses can be severe and might take at least as long to heal as a sprain or broken bone.

Even a minor fall can result in a loss of self confidence as a rider, which is most likely one of the reasons that a fallen rider is encouraged to get back on before the impact on confidence can take hold or intensify. In the terms of cognitive psychology, this is a form of “disputing through action,” that is, assuring oneself through one’s behavior that one can still ride.

For the many of us who have sustained a minor car accident (not to discuss at this point a severe crash), think about the feelings that accompanied the accident. Do you think your judgment was impaired immediately following the crash? If you could choose to drive your minimally damaged car away from the scene, would you elect to do so or would you prefer to sit with a cup of tea (or something stronger) while your jangled nerves returned to normal?

The wisdom behind getting right back in the saddle is related to the concern that during the time between the fall and the next ride, your fears will amplify and perhaps deter you from your sport forever. On the other hand, I have watched very young and minimally prepared trainers mimic the philosophy of the barns that employ them, insisting that a fallen rider get back in the saddle regardless of the psychological shape that the rider (or the horse) is in at the time.

Getting back in the saddle immediately after a fall all too often results in a frightened and shocked rider getting on and practicing feeling afraid and shocked when they ride. Similarly, a rider falling often spooks the horse. Watch the horse’s behavior after the rider has hit the ground. Does he stand or walk around calmly, or

does he run around the arena (or down the road), being difficult to catch?

Practicing being frightened and shocked certainly is not what pressuring the rider to immediately remount was intended to accomplish! If you fall, and are certain you have sustained no injuries (including a concussion), and truly feel ready to remount a horse you know in surroundings with which you are comfortable, then getting back on is not always a bad choice. This is especially true when you are not alone, so that something like a minor concussion, which can begin to manifest in a rather short time after the fall, can be observed by your companion riders and/or trainer. Remember that you need not hit your head to sustain a concussion. Any concussive jolt to the body can cause it, with symptoms such as nausea and dizziness showing up in the hours after the fall.

Take the time that is  
needed to feel the calm  
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horse that will again make  
your riding time pleasurable  
and wonderful.

Having had the privilege to train with world-class coaches, I have seen a few very important things. Once I fell from a big movement Icelandic when I was attempting to decide the type of Icelandic horse I would buy. The fall happened because the tack failed—the girth had torn and the saddle slid back over the mare’s rump, scaring her and landing me in the sand of the arena. Although this was a tack failure, after tending to me, my trainer retacked and mounted the horse herself to be sure that nothing was amiss with the mare. This strongly impressed me. I had never before seen a riding teacher mount the horse herself, to be certain the horse was in shape to be ridden, before asking a novice to ride.

On a second occasion while riding in Europe, I learned the importance of a number of strategies to use immediately after a fall. While these will be discussed in detail in subsequent articles, here I will

note that my trainer always made sure the rider sat quietly for a while, and took a bit of Rescue Remedy (as did the horse!) or other naturopathic medication compounded to alleviate the stress and shock of the fall. We never were pressured to remount immediately, but rather were given time to return to calmness, using meditation, massage, and other activities with our horse, such as grooming, to return ourselves to the bond with our mount.

Note that how a rider responds to a fall, or any traumatic experience with a horse, depends to a great extent on the context of that person’s life and personality. Some of us are more likely to experience anxiety during the course of our lives, while others are more likely to feel depression. Many other emotional and social contexts determine how we will respond to our experiences with horses, particularly those that are “scary” in nature.

Self-patience, mentioned earlier, is particularly important when working through the effects of trauma. As with any kind of difficult experience, take the time that is needed to feel the calm and connection with your horse that will again make your riding time pleasurable and wonderful. As humans, we are fragile, and must work through the amount of risk with which we are comfortable, remembering that our sense of risk is likely to be heightened after experiencing or witnessing a fall. Spending quality time doing things other than riding is very often time well spent, even if we only are sitting outside the paddock cleaning our tack.

When the repercussions of a scary experience are not subsiding over time, consulting someone skilled in behavioral or cognitive-behavioral techniques can be a very helpful adjunct to what our riding teachers and riding companions can offer us.

*Theresa J. Jordan, Ph.D., is the author of Overcoming the Fear of Riding (Breakthrough Publications, 1997). In upcoming articles, she will expand the topics discussed here to include methods and tools for coping with phobias, good fears, and traumatic anxieties before these might feed into panic attacks and post traumatic stress disorder. Contact her at Red Mares Ranch in Aiken, SC; phone 862-250-7515 or redmares@aol.com.*





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*Photo by Eleanor Anderson*

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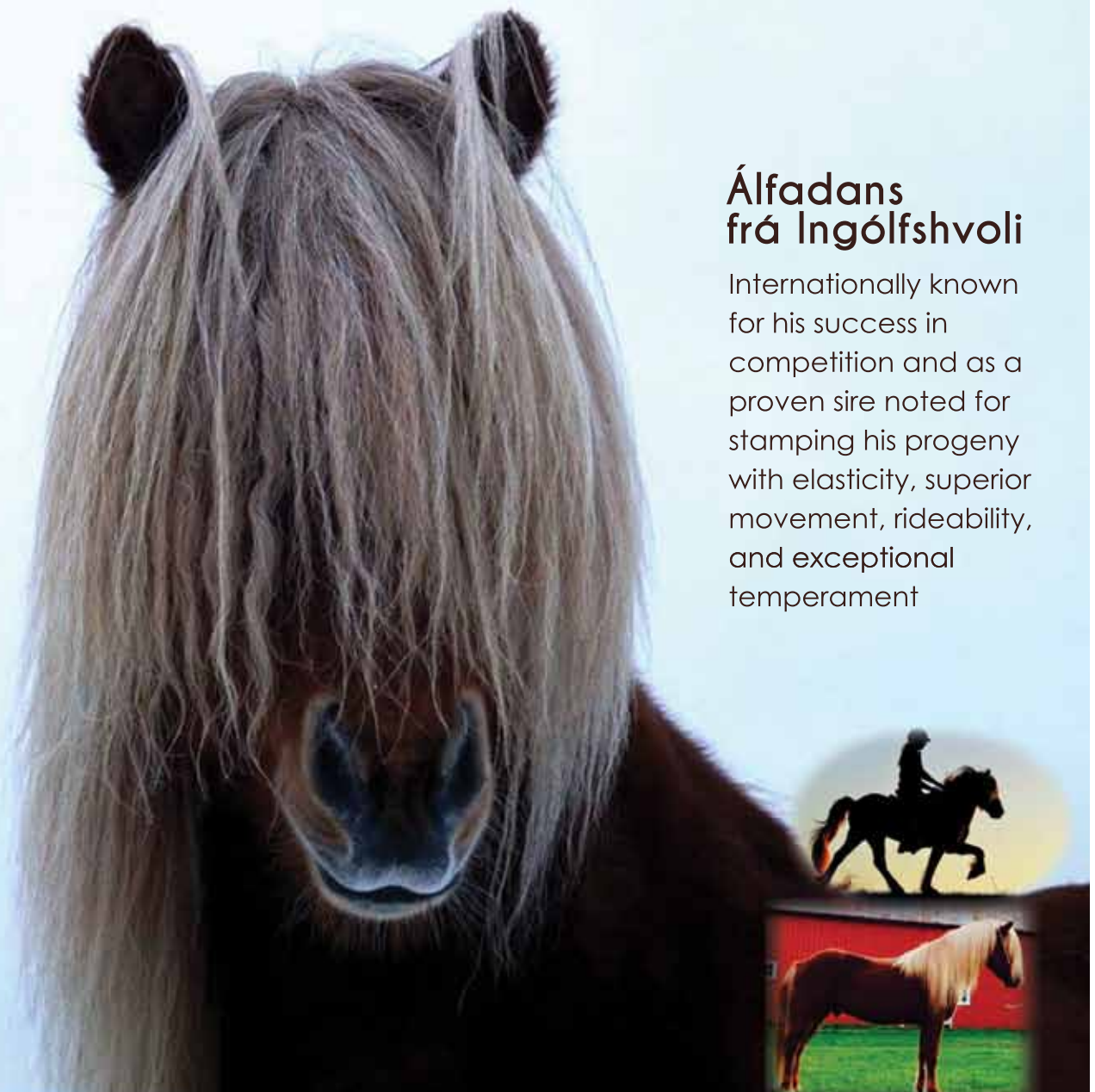
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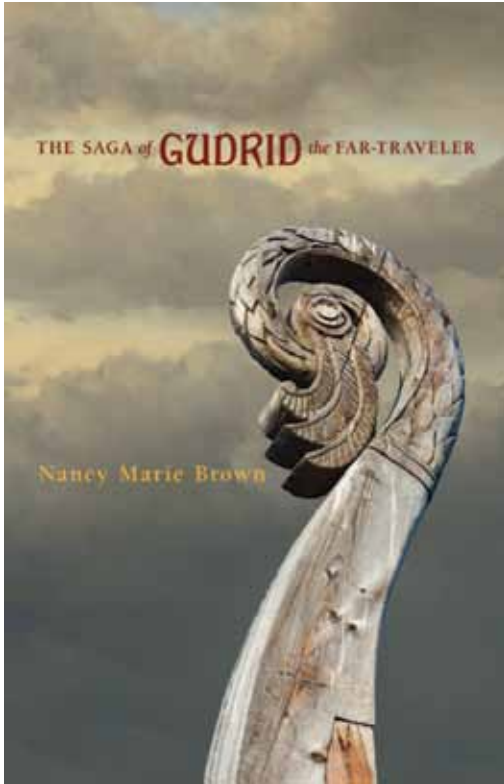
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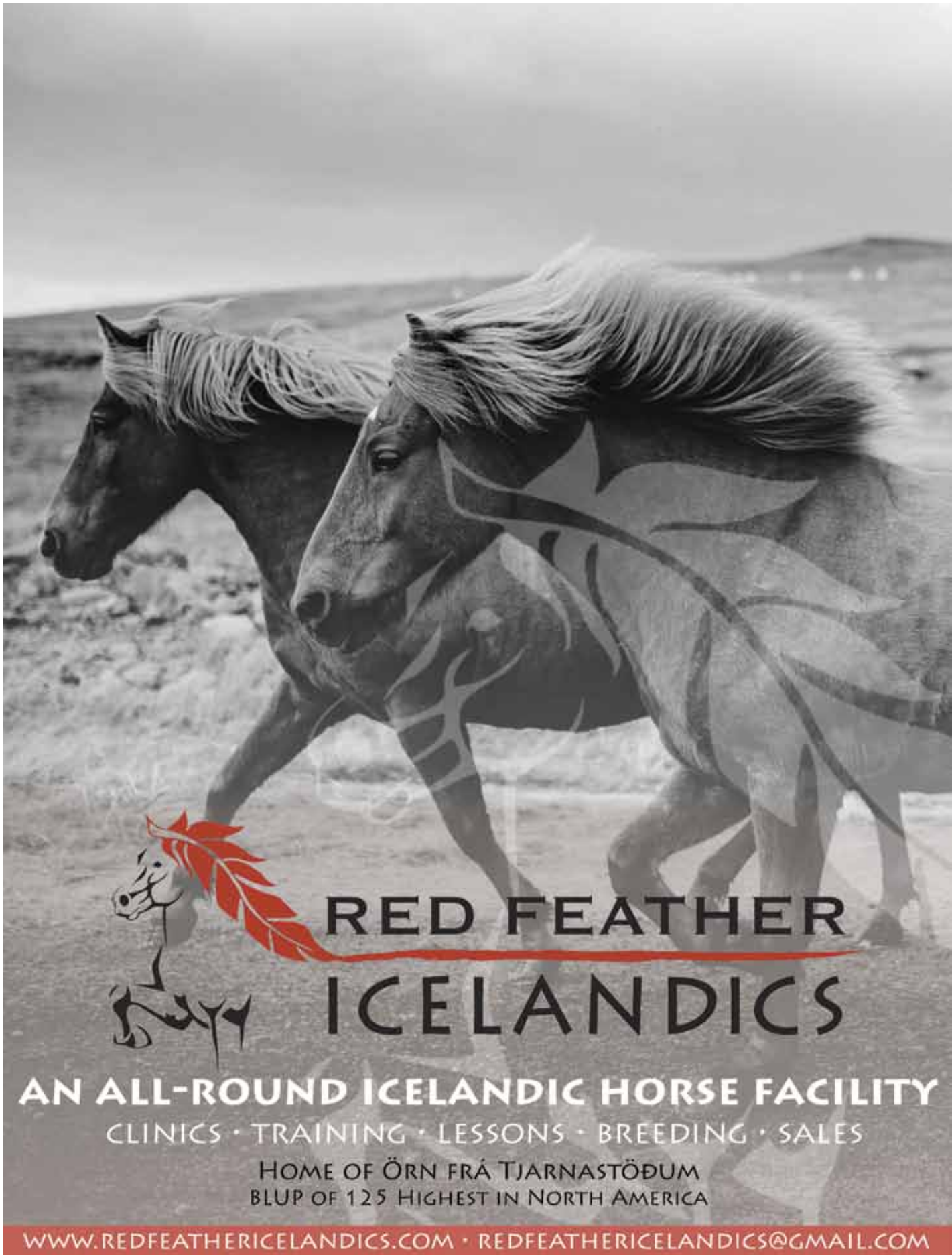
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