

Issue Two

THE

2018

# ICELANDIC HORSE

Q U A R T E R L Y



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



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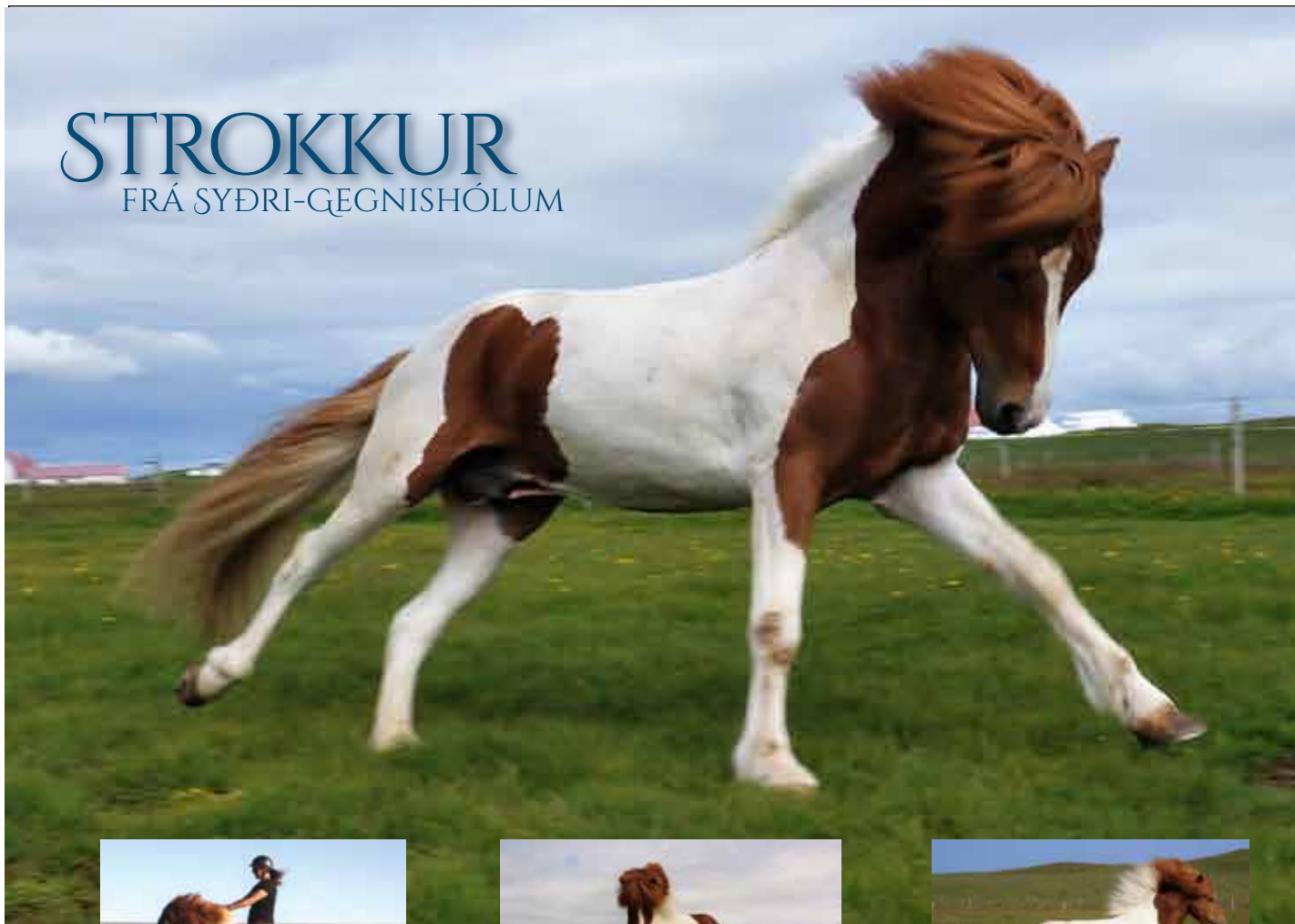


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## Strokkur

frá Syðri-Gegnishólum

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 M. Gryla frá Stangarholti (Mother to Álfadís frá Selfossi HONOR PRIZE)  
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IPZV Trainer B

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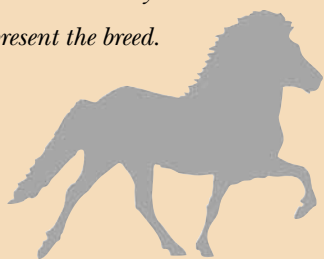


# THE USIHC MISSION

- To promote the knowledge of the Icelandic horse within the United States and its correct use as a competition and riding horse.
- To keep a registry of purebred Icelandic horses in the United States.
- To facilitate communication among all USIHC members.
- To represent the United States in FEIF.

*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 21 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.*



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

Photo of Loki from Bel Di (US2006104223) by Jean Ervasti

## 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 indexed and available online.

You have free access to WorldFengur, the worldwide database of all registered Icelandic horses. About 450,000 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 certified trainers who are USIHC members and can help you get the best out of your Icelandic horse. The Education Committee also offers Sport Judges Seminars for those wanting to learn more about show rules and how to judge competitions. A \$1,000 grant is available to members who complete their certification to become national or international judges.

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 14 affiliated clubs: 13 regional clubs and the Gæðingar Club, an activity club focused on breeding. Find the regional Icelandic riding club in your area through the USIHC website, so that

you and your horse can ride with friends. The USIHC Board has set aside funding for affiliated clubs to host clinics, schooling shows, sanctioned shows, young horse evaluations, and full breeding shows.

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 recommended and prohibited tack and equipment, track sizes, and other information for competition riders.

Sanctioned shows and schooling shows are eligible for USIHC Funding; contact the Competition committee. Show organizers have access to the IceTest software so that eligible scores 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 feed-

back 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 display materials, including brochures and copies of the *Quarterly*. The USIHC has also partnered with the Icelandic marketing campaign Horses of Iceland to provide videos, additional printed materials, personnel, and cost-sharing at such events.

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.

And everybody, members or non-members, can advertise in the *Quarterly*.

## 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 and seminars are eligible for USIHC funding. 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. 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?

Requests for funding for special events and programs can be submitted to the USIHC board of directors and will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Contact the USIHC president for more information.

## JOIN US

There are only about 5,800 registered Icelandic horses in the U.S. and the USIHC, at about 625 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.

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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

Official Publication of the United States Icelandic Horse Congress (USIHC), a member association of FEIF (International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations).

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**On the cover:** Congratulations to Alexandra Dannenmann of the Florida Icehorse Farm for winning the 2017 FEIF Trainer of the Year award. Alex, shown here with her horse Diljá frá Mosfellsbæ, received the award in February at the FEIF Delegates Assembly in Sweden.

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# FROM THE BOARD

## LET'S PROMOTE THE ICELANDIC HORSE!

This is an exciting time for the breed with the influx of tourism in Iceland, as well as the recently launched “Horses of Iceland” marketing campaign. There is a huge opportunity for the USIHC—and especially the Promotion Committee—to connect with and engage horse enthusiasts throughout the country.

As your new Promotion Committee co-chairs, we are excited to tell you a little bit about what our committee is doing this year to continue sharing our incredible Icelandic horses.

One of the most effective ways to promote the breed is by offering breed demos and bringing Icelandic horses to expos in different areas of the U.S. Our beloved horses are our best ambassadors, and with the help of our dedicated USIHC and affiliated club members answering questions, displaying the gaits, and sharing information, people have the opportunity to see the Icelandic horse up close.

The Promotions Committee is excited to share that the USIHC Board has revised Policy 21 to support members and



The USIHC and Horses of Iceland provide promotional materials for expos and events.



The Toppur Club drill team at the Iowa Horse Fair. Toppur members also took their Icelandics to the International Omaha, which boasts dressage and show jumping competitions. Says Virginia Lauridsen, “The audience was enthralled. We ran out of every promotional item I brought.”

affiliated clubs who are promoting the breed at these expos:

*Policy 21. Affiliated Clubs Promotional Breed Demo & Display Stall Matching Funds*  
USIHC may provide matching funds for breed demonstrations or display stalls at trade shows and events across the country for the purpose of promoting the breed and organization.

The total amount of funding for 2018 is \$750 with a maximum limit of \$150 per event to be dispersed on a “first come, first served” basis.

For every dollar spent from the affiliated club, USIHC will match 50% up to \$150.00 (to receive the full \$150, the club must spend at least \$300).

The funds are for the purpose of a breed demonstration or for a display stall at the event.

Only USIHC Affiliated Clubs may request funding through this policy. Individuals who are requesting funding on behalf of their affiliated club need to also be current USIHC members in good standing at the time of the request through the end of the event.

The breed demo or display stall must be for promotional club purposes only, not an advertisement/sales opportunity.

Each club can only receive up to \$150 per year.

Requests for funding must be submitted to the USIHC Promotion Committee chair no less than thirty (30) days in advance of the event. Copies of the agreement with the venue and receipts showing the exact amount paid to the expo organizers must be provided prior to reimbursement.

After all of the above information has been received by the USIHC Promotion Committee Chair, it shall be reviewed for approval/denial of funding. If approved, the USIHC Treasurer will be notified to make the reimbursement, and if denied, a written explanation will be sent.

We believe promotion is vital to the growth and future of our breed. We have seen the importance of promotion, marketing, and branding first hand in our professional lives. Jess started her own Icelandic horse training and lesson business. Emily works in marketing and communications at the Vermont Law School.

We are always looking for more members to join our committee! We are open to any ideas that you may have to help us promote this great breed of horse. If you can spare a little time, we would greatly appreciate your help. Email us at [promotion@icelandics.org](mailto:promotion@icelandics.org). Happy tölting!

—Jess Haynsworth and Emily Potts

## TRAINER OF THE YEAR

Congratulations to Alexandra Dannenmann for winning the 2017 FEIF Trainer of the Year award. The award was announced in February at the FEIF Delegates Assembly in Stockholm, Sweden.

“It really means a lot that there are obviously so many of you who have chosen to vote for me despite many other strong candidates from different FEIF countries,” Alex wrote, upon receiving the award. “I’m not taking your support for granted. I see it as an incentive to continue to do my utmost as a trainer, instructor, and judge, by being self-critical and open-minded with the aim to continuously improve myself. Bringing the award home to the United States, which is still one of the smallest Icelandic horse communities in the world, is something special and hopefully sheds a little light of attention on all of you in America for a moment.”

Alex (shown on the cover of this issue) owns and operates Florida Icehorse Farm in North Fort Myers, FL. She is an IPZV Trainer B and a FEIF International Sport Judge. She also serves on the USIHC Board of Directors and is the chair of our Education Committee.

“Alex has spent her entire life pursuing her passion of riding and training horses,” noted the FEIF announcement. She began her professional career in her native Germany, where she managed a farm offering lessons, training, and horse boarding. She was also a successful competition rider.



FEIF Trainer of the Year Alexandra Dannenmann leading Sporður frá Bergi in Kentucky. “Change your perspective and consider the idea that we do not teach horses anything,” she advises, “we merely elicit what is already latent in them. Give them the chance to show you what they have to offer.” Photo by Anna Vas.

Since moving to Florida in 2013, she has earned her judging certificates and become a highly sought-after judge and clinician for competitions and courses around the U.S. and in Europe.

Alex has changed the lives of many horses and humans through her work traveling around the U.S., as well as internationally. She uses her influence to help others in her community, hosting events for organizations such as Candlelighters of Southwest Florida, which offers inspiration and support to kids and families living with cancer.

She gave a hint of her approach to training on her Facebook page in March, where she wrote, “Believing in someone’s capability, even without the evidence of it and even if the person concerned isn’t aware of his potential himself, requires the willingness to be interested enough in that person to see beyond his façade—to see possibility

where the person himself doesn’t see it. It can change one’s life. It can make a person become brave, question his limits, and do things he normally wouldn’t do. It opens the door to opportunities and success.

“The same applies for the training of horses. We should have great belief in their natural ability and not underestimate that. Change your perspective and consider the idea that we do not teach horses anything, we merely elicit what is already latent in them. Give them the chance to show you what they have to offer. Let the horse surprise itself and let it surprise you by less disturbing and more forward thinking. This perspective gives the horse the chance to find its own balance and to go beyond its limits. The trainer’s job then is to support it accordingly. It is an exchange of skills and ideas from both parts. And that is where relationships develop and progress takes place. With horses, with students, with everyone.”

## 2018 SHOW SEASON

The first shows of the 2018 season took place while this issue was at press. The CIA Spring Open was held April 21-22 at Flying C Ranch in Santa Ynez, CA. And on May 26-27, the Kentucky Sport Competition was held at Léttleiki Icelandics in Shelbyville, KY, in conjunction with a breeding evaluation.

Results of these and all sanctioned shows are available on the USIHC website at [www.icelandics.org/showresults](http://www.icelandics.org/showresults). For contact information and show details, see the USIHC Events Calendar at [www.icelandics.org/calendar](http://www.icelandics.org/calendar).



Since coming to the U.S. in 2013, Alexandra Dannenmann (shown here with her horses Gutti frá Ytri-Skógum, on left, and Þorgeir frá Pulu) has earned her FEIF International Sport Judge certification and been voted FEIF Trainer of the Year.

Upcoming 2018 shows include the Sixth Annual NEIHC Open, to be held at Thor Icelandics in New York (June 23-24); the Flugnirkeppni, at Winterhorse Park in Wisconsin (August 4-5); the Toppur Sanctioned Show, at Harmony Icelandics in Iowa (September 8-9); the AIHA Sanctioned Show, at Alaska Ice Farm in Alaska (September 15-16); the Kentucky World Ranking Event at Léttleiki Icelandics in Kentucky (October 5-7); the CIA Open Fall Sanctioned Show at Flying C Ranch in California (October 13-14); and the Frida Icelandic Horse Sanctioned Show at Montaire Farm in Virginia (October 27-28).

## FEIF YOUTH CUP TEAM

Congratulations to all the young riders who submitted videos to be judged by an International Sport Judge for qualification for the 2018 FEIF Youth Cup. The top score of each rider from T1 and either F1 or V1 were averaged to place each rider in order.

Representing the United States at the Youth Cup, to be held July 28 to August 4 in Axevala, Sweden, will be Alicia Flanagan, Grace Strausser, Isabelle Maranda, and Eden Hendricks. Alternates are Eva Dykaar, Maile Behringer, and Haley Wehrheim.

## BLOOD PROFILE PROJECT

In March, Cornell University returned the USIHC's initial \$5,000 deposit for the Blood Profile Project, organizer Andrea Barber reports. "This means that the entire project was fully funded by individual donations and no USIHC member funds were needed to complete it," she explained. "Individual donations are also being used to support the coming academic journal publication of the project."

The results of the project by veterinary scientists Ashleigh Newman, Tracey Stokol, and Bettina Wagner were published in Issue One 2018 of the *Quarterly*. These include full hematology reference intervals and chemistry references intervals for the Icelandic horse, as well as descriptive statistics (both hematology and chemistry) showing age-related differences within the breed.

"Hematologic and biochemical reference interval tables," the researchers wrote, "are usually provided along with blood test results to help veterinarians detect and di-



Grace ("Gray") Strausser of Pennsylvania will be representing the USIHC at the FEIF Youth Cup in Sweden. Photo by Marilyn Tully

agnose disease. Test results that fall outside of the reference intervals are considered to be abnormal.

"If your horses' blood tests return abnormal results, your horses may be diagnosed with a certain disease or condition, such as liver disease, anemia, or inflammation. Or your vet may request additional testing to try to detect the underlying disease causing the abnormal blood test results. In either case, the quality of the diagnosis depends on the quality of the reference intervals.

"Though our results may seem a little confusing to owners," the researchers conclude, "veterinarians examining and blood testing Icelandic horses in the U.S. can now use these hematologic and biochemical reference intervals as a guide."

## SPORT JUDGES SEMINAR

The fifth USIHC-sponsored Sport Judges Seminar was held by Þorgeir Guðlaugsson on April 26-29 at Red Feather Icelandics in Trout Lake, WA. Þorgeir is a highly experienced and qualified FEIF International Sport Judge, who has judged more World Championships than any other judge. He is also an enthusiastic and caring instructor, with a great range of professional knowledge. His enthusiasm about the subject makes it easy to listen and enables participants of all levels to acquire or improve their knowledge.

These seminars are open to everyone

interested in Icelandic horses. Pleasure riders or non-riders who want to learn more about the different gaits, including recognizing beat or balance problems, and ideas on how to solve those problems, are equally welcome as competition riders who are interested in the assessment of gaits and how to judge horse shows. The seminar includes lectures, video presentations, and practical judging. If requested, a voluntary test at the end of the seminar will be offered in order to qualify as a U.S. intern judge.

For information on becoming a sport judge, see [www.icelandics.org/sportjudge-matrix](http://www.icelandics.org/sportjudge-matrix). For dates of future seminars, contact Alex at [education@icelandics.org](mailto:education@icelandics.org).

## 2018 EVALUATIONS

Three USIHC breeding horse evaluations are scheduled for 2018. The first will be held at Léttleiki Icelandics in Shelbyville, KY, on May 23-24, along with a USIHC-sanctioned sport competition on May 26-27. Judges for the breeding show will be Þorvaldur Kristjánsson and Marlise Grimm, both of whom judged the breeding evaluations at the World Championships last year.

The second 2018 breeding evaluation will be hosted by the NEIHC at Cobbleskill Fairgrounds in New York on September 3-4, with a young horse assessment to follow the assessment of adult riding horses.

On September 6-7, the third evaluation will be held at Harmony Icelandics in



Isabelle Maranda of Vermont will be representing the USIHC at the FEIF Youth Cup in Sweden. Photo by Heidi Benson.



Alicia Flanigan of Maine will be representing the USIHC at the FEIF Youth Cup in Sweden. Photo by Charlotte Reilly.

Iowa, co-hosted by the Toppur and Flugnir USIHC-affiliated clubs. The Toppur Sanctioned sport competition will follow the breeding show.

## SEA 2 SHINING SEA

Organized by the Leisure Riding Committee, the Sea 2 Shining Sea Ride is a virtual tour of the United States. The ride runs from July 4, 2017 to July 3, 2018 and is open to all USIHC members, either as individuals or as teams. All the details (including the fine print and a running score chart) can be found on the USIHC website at <https://www.icelandics.org/s2ss>.

As of the beginning of April, our riders have collectively traveled over 45,927 miles. In first place is the Klettafjalla Icelandic Horse Club, who have completed the circuit of the United States with 10,882.2 miles. Second is the Northeast Icelandic Horse Club, who were last seen töltling past the Statue of Liberty with 9,808.8 miles. Third is the Hell's Icies Pony Club, who had by then reached the Everglades National Park with 7,665 miles.

## BOARD MEETINGS

The USIHC board of directors met in person at the Annual Meeting on January 13, and by conference call on January 23, February 20, and March 13. Complete min-

utes, including the monthly Treasurer's and Secretary's reports, can be found online at [www.icelandics.org/bod/minutes](http://www.icelandics.org/bod/minutes).

According to the January 13 minutes, "The board met briefly before the Annual Meeting to discuss our members' concerns regarding our decision to pull the committee chair positions back into the board as in prior to 2006 (See Policy #8). The board is concerned about the strong responses this has created and has been in the process of revising old and creating new policies that will prevent this in the future. The board agreed to post the topic of our future Executive Sessions and how the board voted, so our membership understands what we are discussing and deciding upon. The board agreed that to 'undo' our decision was not productive and our best path was to go forward into 2018 with a well-defined charter to listen to our members by soliciting input, and to communicate with our members in the most frequent and transparent fashion possible."

The board's responses to suggestions made at the Annual Meeting can also be found in the meeting minutes.

The January 23 meeting was devoted to the 2018 budget. The board had decided that a \$10,000 deficit should be their target for 2018, however a \$12,673.34 deficit was approved. Some traditional budget items (shows, regional club clinics) will be considered more as "start-up" assistance which diminishes over time as these events become self-sustaining; this thinking was incorporated into the budget process. In general, funding was increased for educational seminars, breeding evaluations, the Sea 2 Shining Sea leisure riding program, and promotion; funding was decreased for sanctioned shows and Regional Club clinic support. The USIHC's major budget expense, as usual, is the publication and distribution of the *Quarterly*. The complete 2018 budget can be seen in the January 23 meeting minutes.

In addition to those topics already highlighted in this section, discussion at the February board meeting centered on breeding evaluations, instructional materials for trainers, updates to the website, developing a new logo and brand, interactions with Horses of Iceland, new initiatives on the

USIHC Facebook page, the World Championships, and the writing or rewriting of several USIHC policies to bring them in line with the Congress's current operations and funding.

At the March meeting, the NEIHC was announced as hosts of the 2019 USIHC Annual Meeting, to be held in Boston. Additional revisions to some policies were made based on committee feedback, and ideas were shared on increasing USIHC membership. The Breeding committee advanced a new project, led by Coralie Denmeade, to develop a "Breeders Packet" of information, including timelines and checklists to help both stallion and mare owners. The Youth committee is focusing on promoting the Spaeri Essay Award. The Leisure Riding committee replaced the Rider of the Month with a new Leisure Scout award; the committee is also working on a new route for the 2018/2019 Sea 2 Shining Sea ride. The Promotion committee reported that three clubs (Sirius, Flugnir, and Toppur) requested funding for expos; all three meet the guidelines for Policy 21 funds. The committee also discussed its goals for the USIHC website.

To get involved in these or other USIHC committee projects, contact the committee chairs listed on page 8.



Eden Hendricks of California will be representing the USIHC at the FEIF Youth Cup in Sweden. Photo by Heidi Benson.



## FEIF CONFERENCE

The 2018 FEIF conference was held in Stockholm, Sweden in February. Minutes of the Delegates Assembly and the committee meetings (breeding, chairpersons, education, leisure riding, sport, and youth) are now available on the FEIF website at [www.feif.org/Service/Documents/Conference.aspx](http://www.feif.org/Service/Documents/Conference.aspx).

Also available are the keynote presentations by Þorgeir Guðlaugsson ("A Roadtrip to New Judges' Guidelines") and Silvie Rizo ("Characterization of Leisure Horses"), as well as highlights of a draft proposal on doping rules, and other reports of interest to Icelandic horse owners around the world.

Speaking on the development of FEIF's new approach to judging, for example, Þorgeir noted that "the welfare of the horse has been one of the main leading lights." He remarked that a growing awareness of the responsible use of the horse, propelled by growing knowledge, "has put its mark on methods and approaches in horse handling, training, and riding in recent years." Such changes are "not a matter of fashion or temporary political correctness," he added, but steps "in the direction of a more civilized society."

He concluded, "The core of this mindset is the recognition of the horse as a partner in the sport and the acceptance of our responsibilities for its welfare. A

competition horse is not a sport utensil like a golf club or a running shoe, but a living animal that can be harmed mentally as well as physically. Using a living animal to fulfill our ambitions and competitiveness comes with a responsibility and the rejection of the attitude that the goal always justifies the means. Winning is good, but it should never come at the cost of the horse's wellbeing."

## VOLUNTEERS

"In all areas of our work with Icelandic horses, we need reliable, enthusiastic, and skilled volunteers," noted the organizers of the 2018 FEIF Conference. The question of how to recruit, keep, and encourage volunteers was addressed in a workshop for the FEIF delegates, led by Karl Friðriksson. Using the Finnish AIR OPERA method, participants enjoyed lively discussions, brainstorming moments, and good teamwork. See Karl's report at [https://www.feif.org/files/documents/volunteer\\_workshop2018.pdf](https://www.feif.org/files/documents/volunteer_workshop2018.pdf).

## YOUTH COUNTRY

Each year FEIF invites its member countries to report on their activities and initiatives in the field of youth work. All these reports are published on the website, so that new ideas can be shared with other countries. An award goes to the country that has been the most active and the most innovative in their youth work during the year. The winning entry

receives a trophy and is allowed an additional spot in the FEIF Youth Event of the following year, either Youth Cup or Youth Camp.

The FEIF Youth Country of the Year for 2017 is Denmark. The Danish youth riders (around 10% of all members of the Danish Icelandic Horse Association are estimated to be 18 and younger) formed a Youth Committee by themselves. Within the first year of their existence, they organized the Danish Youth Cup, which was a week-long event involving 48 riders, plus trainers, judges, and a large number of volunteers. They also created an Instagram account that visits a different horse professional every month, offering a glimpse into the lives and work of the Danish young riders' role models.

## TRAINER OF THE YEAR

The FEIF trainer/instructor of the Year Award for 2017 went to Alexandra Dannemann of the United States. (See our cover story under "USIHC News.")

## NEW RULES AND REGULATIONS

The updated FEIF General Rules and Regulations, as well as the regulations for breeding, education, sport, and youth, are now online and available for download on the FEIF website ([www.feif.org](http://www.feif.org)). All rules and regulations are valid as of April 1, 2018.

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## NEW GENERAL RULES

The following three changes to the General Rules might be of interest to sport riders:

1. All types of artificial noisemaking devices are prohibited at competitions.
2. Shoes on sport horses must follow the size and form of the hoof.
3. A specific section is added to the rules on the topic of the loss of a shoe in sport competition. The rider should stop the presentation as soon as possible. The text describes which marks the rider keeps after the shoe is lost.

## NEW SPORT RULES

Here are some of the changes to the Sport Rules section:

1. An F3 test is added to the five-gait tests. In F3, the mark for tölt is not doubled, and the rider is only required to show a single pace sprint to receive full marks for the pace section, which is doubled.
2. The amount of time riders are expected to show lengthened strides in T1 and T3 (in groups of five or more riders) has been reduced, and the amount of time riders are expected to show loose rein tölt in T2, T4, and T6 (in groups of four or more riders) has also been reduced.
3. Young Rider World Champions have the right to return to the next World Championships to compete in either age class and in any test(s) under the same conditions as adult World Champions.
4. World Ranking competition organizers may face a fine if they are found in violation of the rules or engaging in discriminatory behavior toward the riders.
5. International FEIF Sport Judges must participate in all formal, online video judging exercises to keep their licenses valid. The Sport Judges Committee may limit the number of new FEIF International License candidates based on an online video judging exercise.

## EXPERIMENTAL CHANGES

Two proposed rule changes are still in the experimental stage:

1. The national Sport Leaders have asked the FEIF Sport Committee to

extend the experimental status of alternative shoeing methods in sport competition for two more years.

2. In T2 Finals, organizers may ask riders to show loose rein tölt on both hands. This change was not approved as a formal rule change by the 2018 Delegates Assembly, but is still supported by the national Sport Leaders. Organizers and judges at competitions where loose rein tölt is shown on both hands during the finals are kindly requested to provide feedback to the FEIF Sport Committee.

## APPS UPDATED

Both Sport support apps have been updated for the 2018 rules.

The Guidelines app (<https://appstore.com/dougsmith/guidelines>) is a training tool for using the firewall system of the Sport Judges Guidelines.

The Timer app (<https://appstore.com/dougsmith/fipotimer>) helps competition organizers and judges to control the time horses are asked to perform each part of a test.

## SPORT JUDGES SEMINAR

More than 60 international and national sport judges attended a seminar in Rieden, Germany, in March, during the World Tölt event. The main focus of the seminar was on pace, including practical judging and video analyses based on the World Tölt presentations, as well as the guidelines on the new F3 test. Presentations included "Movement in Pace and Tölt" by Lena Lennartsson and an update of the 2017 survey on ethics by Fi Pugh.

## TRAINER SEMINAR

In March, the FEIF Trainer Seminar, "Teaching to Teach," was presented at Hólar University in Iceland. The seminar was organized by Sveinn Ragnarsson, the head of Hólar's Equine Science Department, and Silke Feuchthofen, the FEIF Director of Education.

Internationally known riders from Hólar, including Mette Manseth, Anton Pall Nielson, and Toti Eymundsson, introduced the university's educational system through practice-oriented lectures. Islay Auty spoke on "Coaching: How Riders

Learn," and Lars Roepstorff on "Technical Possibilities and the Future of Riders' Education," while Eyjólfur Ísólfsson gave a lively lecture on the development of rider and horse training in Iceland in the past and present, emphasizing the value of riding and training transitions. A final highlight was a demonstration by Hólar students of "Gæðingafimi," or Icelandic dressage, in four- and five-gait.

## BREEDING SEMINAR

The FEIF Breeding Judges had their bi-annual seminar at Hvanneyri, Iceland in March, with 29 judges attending. The program included presentations by Eyjólfur Ísólfsson and Gestur Páll Júlíusson. The participants also discussed a test version of a linear description of conformation and riding.

## LANDSMOT

The Festival of the Icelandic Horse, Landsmót hestamanna, will be held July 1-8 in Reykjavik, Iceland. Say the organizers, "Landsmót is all about the best Icelandic horses performing their talents: gæðingakeppni, tölt, pace, and breeding shows. But Landsmót is also about meeting and making friends, and enjoying riding, walking, and camping in the Icelandic evening sun—since it stays bright the whole night!" For more information, see <http://www.landsmot.is/en>.



# CLUB UPDATES

There are 14 Regional Clubs and one Activity Club affiliated with the U.S. Icelandic Horse Congress. To find the one nearest you, see the USIHC website at [www.icelandics.org/region-alclubs](http://www.icelandics.org/region-alclubs). Contact information for each club can also be found there. The following clubs filed updates on their activities this quarter.

## ALASKA

BY JANE WEHRHEIM

As I write this, it is the time of year for having horse hair on everything we own, and with all of us impatiently waiting for spring and riding season. Our summer is lined up with a Trausti Guðmundsson clinic, a Steinar Sigurbjörnsson clinic, a Tölt Alaska Youth Camp, a USIHC-sanctioned show in September, and a few other events here and there. Thanks to Janet Mulder, the Alaska Icelandic Horse Association website is new and improved. All events are posted: please go on and check it out at [alaskaicelandics.org](http://alaskaicelandics.org)!



Remember snow? It wasn't so long ago in Alaska. Photo of Drynur from Pegasus by Brooke Wehrheim.

## FRIDA (MID-ATLANTIC)

BY MARILYN TULLY

The Frida Icelandic Riding Club opened its year on March 11 with our Annual Kick-Off Party, held at Thorpe Wood, a



Practice makes perfect! The first practice of 2018 for the Frida North Drill Team: (left to right) Marilyn Tully, Nancy Adler, Pat Branum, Millie Angelino, and Laura McCann. Photo by Charlotte Reilly.

magnificent hand-hewn timber frame lodge situated amid the streams and beauty of the Catoctin Mountains of Thurmont, MD. Thank you Sally Thorpe and Sam and Julie Castleman! Frida has a new board of directors and a plan in place to reenergize the membership. Members were asked to weigh in on what they would like to see the club focus on in the upcoming year and what suggestions they might have to generate more interest. Trail rides were at the top of the list. Horse camping, drill teams, clinics, and shows rounded out the areas of interest.

The Annual Kick-Off opened with an unmounted free clinic offered by Sandy Newkirk, a founding member of Frida. Sandy worked with horses in Germany for 15 years. She has taught riding, designed college level equestrian science programs, and translated German studies in dressage and biomechanics into English. Since then she has worked to apply her knowledge of classical horse training to fit the gaited horse.

In the first of a series of clinics on how to build a better equine athlete, she introduced club members to the three main qualities most riders are seeking in their horse: expressiveness, safety, and partnership. Since a horse was not originally meant to carry people, it is incumbent upon riders to do everything they can to make riding comfortable for

the horse. More than anything, horses need a strong topline. Just like humans, horses are asymmetrical, some more than others. They have a preferred side or a stronger side.

"Sidedness," Sandy said, can be in any part of the horse's anatomy. For example, a horse can have a hoof preference, with one hoof propped under the shoulder and one stretched forward. Sandy recommended that programs be structured to make adjustments to the horse's muscle balance in order to allow the horse to feel more comfortable and stronger. Unequal distribution of weight, Sandy said, will disrupt the horse's gaits. Some signs that your horse is off balance may include the fact that the horse prefers only one canter lead, or one shoulder is more muscular (larger) than the other, or the saddle slips to one side.

Every horse has a short side and a long side, Sandy explained. A horse may fall in on the short side and be stiff on the long side. Contact with the horse's mouth may feel more resistant on one side. Ironically, the side the horse feels stiffer on is usually his stronger side and the other his hollow side, she said. Interestingly, often the horse's mane falls on the short side of the horse. One way to correct uneven muscle development is through straightness training. Exercises that help the horse to lift through its back will help

build evenness. As a result, the horse will be able to “listen” to its rider better.

In upcoming sequels to this fascinating clinic series, Sandy will teach straightening from the ground, what natural symmetry is, how to flex and bend your horse correctly, how to stretch the topline, and more. Sandy is offering free followup clinics to her series on “The Secret to Getting the Most Out of Your Icelandic Horse” on April 14 and 22, and May 12. Contact Suzi McGraw at [icehorsesusa@hotmail.com](mailto:icehorsesusa@hotmail.com) for details.

On April 28-29, Stony Knoll Farm in Schwenksville, PA will host a Groundwork and Trail Obstacle Clinic with Terral Hill of Taktur Icelandics, organized by Gray Strausser and Marilyn Tully.

Drill teams are already meeting at both the north and south ends of the Frida geographic area to accommodate the travel needs of club members. Marilyn Tully hosts the Drill Team North at Horse Hill Farm Icelandic Horses in Coatesville, PA, while Pat Carballo hosts Drill Team South at Antje Freygang’s farm, Montaire, in Middleburg, VA.

The first club trail ride of the year will be led by Bob Shoemaker and Carrie Laurecot on May 5 at Little Bennett Regional Park in Clarksburg, MD.

Plans are in the works for the Frida Sanctioned Show at Montaire Farm in Middleburg, VA on October 27-28. Show manager Curt Pierce said the club is hoping to make this a spectacular event. If you plan on attending the show, Antje says, “You’d better get your hotel accommodations now.” Late October is a busy time in the Middleburg area.

Frida is in the process of creating a new website that will be easier to navigate, be visually more appealing, automate the dues payment process, and look fresh and current. Gray Strausser is finishing up the details and the new site will be launched in the near future at [www.firc.us](http://www.firc.us).

Frida is proud to announce that our own junior board member Gray Strausser has been selected to represent the United States at the 2018 FEIF Youth Cup in Axelville, Sweden this July! Congratulations to Gray on this tremendous achievement.

## GLITFAXA (CALIFORNIA)

BY GABRIELE MEYER

Winter, for the most part, was too dry and too warm and left us wondering what type of clipping would best accommodate 70-plus degrees F during the days and around freezing at night. The weather gods tried to make it up to us by sending cold weather and a lot of rain clouds our way in March. Just barely awakening from hibernation, we had to jumpstart our energy for the Santa Rosa Gaited Horse Show on March 24. This gaited show was hosted by the Bay Area Fox Trotter Association (BAFTA) at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds (that is, by the way, where hundreds of horses were evacuated to during the Santa Rosa firestorm in October of last year).

The show has a long history as a meeting point for gaited horses. Missouri Fox Trotters, Tennessee Walkers, Paso Finos, Rocky Mountain Horses and Peruvian Pasos, among others, came from all over northern California. We admired the colorful and sparkling Western outfits of Tennessee Walkers and Co., and reversely, there were quite a number of big horses suffering from “mane envy,” as one rider smilingly remarked.

This was the first time that a group of Icelandics had participated in this show



At the Santa Rosa Gaited Show, Glitfaxes member Gabriele Meyer and Askur conquer the boardwalk in the novice trail class. Photo by Nicki Esdorn.

(which does not allow any artificial gait enhancing gadgets, just in case you wondered). Four Glitfaxes members participated with their horses and two members came without horses, to help and to cheer us on. And, as a very pleasant surprise, we met a formerly unknown Icelandic rider



Gabriele and Askur navigate the ladder obstacle in the same class. Photo by Nicki Esdorn.





Gliffaxa members at the Santa Rosa Gaited Horse Show (left to right): Henriette Bruun on Faxi from Creeksedge, Lisa Herbert on Bangsi, Gabriele Meyer on Askur, and Pia Tucker on Blakkur fra Stora-Vattnskardi. Photo by Nicki Esdorn.

and her gelding at the show! She quickly became part of our group and decided to join our club.

The show offered six Trail Classes (which consist of an obstacle course set up in a super-sized arena) and about 50 Rail Classes. While the trail classes are about trust, the rail classes are the ones where riders show the different gaits of their horses. As the name implies, the riders mostly stay at the rail (with a few exceptions). Most of the rail classes were breed specific, with a smaller number open to any gaited horse.

We had a lot of fun despite some extended waiting times between classes. Which, on the other hand, gave us enough time to catch up after the winter. We also had plenty of opportunities to talk with other people, explaining what breed our horses were and what we do with them. All in all, we experienced a rather relaxed show atmosphere, and met very interested and friendly horse people.

Our three Icelandic classes were: Pleasure Tölt, 2-Gait (pick your gaits),

and 4-Gait (tölt/trot/walk/canter). For the rail classes, our group had to enter in walk and was given a little time to spread out. Then the gaits were called, we had to reverse in walk, and then the gaits were called again. We riders just tried to look like this was all fun (what it was) and our faithful horses pretended that they loved to do their job (which was mostly true too).

Obviously, this was not like an oval track competition, and judging was not with scores as we know it: The judges just placed the riders. There was no feedback as to what was good or bad. I think we all knew that and had opted to come anyway to ride for exposure, practice, and fun! While the rail classes were exciting to ride, the more interesting class for me personally was a trail class.

I had chosen to also participate in the novice trail class, for horses that have not won three blue ribbons in any trail classes yet. Because we have no trail obstacles to practice at the barn where I board, my intention was to expose my

horse to that sort of activity at the show. But looking at the obstacles in the early morning, I was having second thoughts and became afraid that this could become a real embarrassment for me and, much worse, for our breed. Fortunately, FEIF Trainer Nicki Esdorn was one of our Gliffaxa spectators and was always there when needed. She advised me to relax, give the horse time to look, and go through the obstacles one step at a time.

When I finally entered the arena, I must have forgotten to breathe, which I noticed while tackling the second obstacle (side pass astride a pole to a mail box and back). Okay, breathe! Next obstacle was a curved wooden ladder where the horse had to step between the rungs. Slow down, ground yourself. I pointed Askur toward the ladder and off he went, without the slightest hesitation, soft and fluid, as if he had done this a hundred times before.

Next obstacle was an S-shaped boardwalk with two 90-degree turns. To increase the difficulty, it was constructed



Cathy Hinds on Andi from Evans Farm shows off her Hestafolk logo vest.

at different heights, so that in addition to the corners, the horse had to step either up or down. I clearly remember the moment I noticed my tunnel vision, just as we approached the obstacle. I tried to soften my eyes (and not to forget again to breathe), and the horse dealt beautifully with both curves and steps.

Then came a square made of poles on the ground, filled with dozens of empty water bottles that crumpled under the horse's hooves, making an unpleasant crackling sound. Anticipating problems, I had been hanging out near that obstacle before our ride to subject Askur to that sound. He stepped inside, turned 360 degrees, stepped out—slowly—done!

From there on, everything was a breeze: Carrying a flag, opening and closing a gate (thank you, Lisa, for posting how to do that on our Facebook page a while ago!), crossing a tarp, turning



Hestafolk members on a fox hunt (left to right): Brandy Ferber-Christiansen on Birta from Extreme Farm, A.J. West on Gloinn from Rivendell, Lisa McKeen on Elska from Extreme Farm, and Brechelle Ware on Lukka from Extreme Farm. Photo by Geoffrey Tyson.

within a smallish pole square and backing out again, and pole weaving in tölt. In the end, we placed second, not bad for an intended “practice round” and considering the number of participants!

What we learned from riding in this all-breed gaited horse show:

Be patient. There will be long waiting times between classes, as there are many horses at these all-breed shows, probably four to five times as many as at a typical Icelandic show in the U.S. That's the fun of it. Socialize and seize the opportunity to take a good look at how other breeds gait, move, and do things. Some of it you might not like, but a lot of things you will!

Read and follow the class descriptions! Don't be fast if that hasn't been asked for. At least one rider of our group couldn't resist tölting fast in the Pleasure Tölt class, which called for a slow to medium tölt, and she was marked down for that.

Try to adjust your mindset. This is not an event where you should take your ambitions too seriously. The rides are not being judged according to FEIF rules and regulations, but the judges are very experienced and recognize a relaxed horse with a good rhythm and shape when

they see one! Try to take the term “horse show” literally: an exhibition where you show off the beauty of your horse. And don't forget to smile.

## HESTAFOLK (NORTHWEST WASHINGTON)

BY LISA MCKEEN

Our first meeting of the year was held on January 27. We discussed our club structure and decided to make no further changes for now. We will re-visit that in the fall. This was our first year having membership dues. We found that we lost a couple of members, but picked up several more, so we have a total of 29 memberships; six of those are associate members who live too far away to participate frequently, and one is a youth member who also falls under one of our family memberships.

We are excited to be growing. One of the happy things that is happening is that some of our associate members are starting a Hestafolk-South Facebook page so that they can communicate more easily with one another and organize rides. We will try to join them when it is possible. Our mission is to share our love

of Icelandics and to facilitate the learning and gathering of all in our community. With that in mind, we have opened our Facebook page so that more people can find us. A website may be in our future. Our club got t-shirts for members this year and will continue to encourage folks to order gear from a local company with our beautiful logo.

The club has approved and provided start-up funds for a Hestafolk 4-H Club to support our youth. We hope to eventually have them show our horses in local shows, but before then we are all doing beginning horsemanship for basic safety training. Other interests and projects include photography, chickens, rocketry, and archery.

One of the great things about Whatcom County and the area we live in are the great number of parks to ride in. We voted to join the Sunset Farm as a club to help keep the facility open. The facility has an arena with training jumps and obstacles, a jumping course with a water crossing, a big open field, and also trails that connect to the local bayside town of Birch Bay. We will do community service by helping to clean and care for the equestrian park.

Four of us made a trip to Orcas Island in the San Juans to visit with Wanda Evans and bring back three beautiful horses who are in new homes or soon will be. It was a beautiful ferry trip and, if you haven't ever ridden the ferries through the San Juans out here, put it on your bucket list. Spectacular views and warm friendly folks are the norm. Of course, touring Evans Farm with Wanda is the best part!

Four Icelandics and their riders were able to attend the Woodbrook Hunt Club's Fox Hunt on March 24 with RJ West (Paddy). She has been fox hunting for years and her gracious invitation and teaching to us made the day wonderful. (See her article in Issue Three 2016 of the *Quarterly*.)

Events planned for spring include: a Youth Fair on April 6-7, a clinic with Freya Sturm on April 14-15, a clinic with Guðmar Pétursson on April 27-29, and a clinic with Wendy Murdock on May 19-20.



The Ambassadors of Iceland—Heidi Benson on Disa, Coralie Denmeade on Freyðis, Jeny Feldner on Leiðsögn, and Florie Miller on Prins—representing the Klettafjalla Club at the Rocky Mountain Horse Expo in Denver. Photo by Bianca McCarty.

Several members are attending the Canada breeding evaluations at Fitjamyri in British Columbia on June 9-10, and we are excited about our slumber parties and seeing how our club members' horses perform. Also scheduled for June 23-24 is a Freya Sturm Clinic in Ridgefield, WA put on by CIHC.

Our Leavenworth trip, July 5-8, is a club favorite, as we are looking forward to seeing how full we can pack the house and are excited for camping too. Lisa McKeen is the lead.

In August is our Club Trip to the Peninsula! We will travel to ride with



On the trail: Klettafjalla members Stephen Pace rides Lýsingur and Barbara Ohm rides Pála. Photo by Lee Ann Ott.

our members, Judy and Natira, who live there. We are looking forward to a long weekend of riding in the rain forests and on the beaches. Lynn Pinkey and Judy Skogen are leads.

In September, we will once again be hosting a display at the All Breeds Showcase at the Washington State Fair in Puyallup, WA. Over a million people pass through the gates and we were able to connect with many folks interested in Icelandics. We built a Viking ship and decorated the stalls to look like a ship. We will follow the same theme this year.

We close out the year's calendar with another Freya Sturm Clinic in October, our yearly Movie Meeting in November, and begin planning for 2019 in December. Happy Trails!

## **KLETTAFJALLA (ROCKY MOUNTAINS)**

*BY KRISTINA STELTER*

Klettafjalla has had an exciting first quarter, kicking off with hosting the USIHC annual meeting in Denver, CO! After a successful meeting, we welcomed new board members to our wonderful club: Secretary, Linda McLaughlin; Professional Contributor, Ulla Hudson; Regional Liaison Leader, Mary Dennison; Events Co-Coordinator, Pam Spooner and Jeny Feldner; and *Quarterly* Liaison and Social Media Manager, Kristina Stelter. We are

so excited to have all of these wonderful people on board!

Soon after the annual meeting, Coralie Denmeade of Tamangur Icelandics hosted a USIHC Riding Badge Series, which included Guest Speaker Tom Mowery, discussions of horse behavior, training methods, and the Icelandic gaits.

Klettafjalla then participated in the Rocky Mountain Horse Expo in Denver. Tamangur Icelandics once again topped the headlines with their exquisite quadrille performance in the Mane Event. We are immensely proud of Tamangur and the work they do with Klettafjalla and their strong promotion of the Icelandic horse.

One of our members, Maile Behringer, tried out for the 2018 FEIF Youth Cup in Sweden. Maile earned 3rd Alternate, proudly representing Klettafjalla.

Klettafjalla recently added an Instagram account to its social media presence: @klettafjalla. If you want your horse featured, let us know. We've found that it is a great way to promote the breed to those who do not own Icelandics but are equestrians, as well as a successful platform to reach out to those who are interested in horses, but may not own any. Also have a look at our new website at [www.klettafjalla.com](http://www.klettafjalla.com). It's lovely, modern, and easy to use.

Aside from these major updates, we



Olivia Rasmussen rides Sylgja frá Ketilsstöðum in a clinic with Freyja Amble Gísladóttir organised by members of the Kraftur Club. Photo by Heidi Benson.

have been riding all winter due to the warm weather, so we're hoping to really shine in our Sea 2 Shining Sea goals. Come catch us—if you can!

## **KRAFTUR (NORTHERN CALIFORNIA)**

*BY HEIDI BENSON*

We are pleased to report that Kraftur has regrouped and is back on track with a new board of directors after a short down time. Meggin Hendricks will be taking over as club president, Jean Marie Scott

as vice president, Deb Avila-White as secretary, and Carol Tolbert as treasurer. We are currently working on gathering former and new members in the Northern California region. We are planning a number of activities, such as monthly group rides, drill team practices, clinics, schooling shows, and sanctioned shows. We are excited to reactivate our local club and to offer more fun and educational opportunities for our northern California Icelandic horse community.

## **NEIHC (NORTHEAST)**

*BY JESS HAYNSWORTH*

Happy Spring! We still have a lot of snow here in Vermont, but the clumps of winter horse hair on the barn floor (and on our clothes and in our mouths) remind us that warm weather is on its way!

This past quarter was an important one for the NEIHC, as we've had an election and change in leadership. Our new board of directors is: Emily Potts, President; Brigit Huwyler, Vice-President; Cindy Wescott, Secretary; Leslie Chambers, Treasurer; Jessica Haynsworth, Youth Coordinator, Reports, and Social Media; Ebba Meehan, Promotion and Education; Leah Greenberger, Fundraising; and Isabelle Maranda, Board Youth Representative. Congratulations to the new board!



Kraftur member Mouse Hedrick meets one-week-old Neptúnus from Sæstöðum. Photo by Heidi Benson.

Their term runs from April 1, 2018 to March 31, 2020. We would also like to thank our previous board, especially Martina Gates who served as club president for many terms.

On March 3, our Annual Meeting and Thorrablot Party was held at Ebba Meehan's Merrimack Valley Icelandics in Boxford, MA. The festivities began with an educational lecture. Annie and Jeremiah Kemp, of Common Ground Hoofcare, delivered a seminar called "Beat & Balance: Shoeing the Icelandic Horse for Soundness, Longevity, and Performance Using Traditional and Alternative Materials." The lecture was extremely well-received, with great audience participation.

This lecture ended up being very timely, as FEIF has just made the exciting decision to allow alternative shoeing and nonmetal hoof protection for another two years. Back in 2016, Amy Goddard, Kathy Sierra, and I submitted a proposal to the USIHC Board requesting that composite (nonmetal) shoes and hoof boots be allowed in sport competition. We made this proposal in response to research that demonstrates that nonmetal hoof protection reduced concussion on our horses' joints, and improves their chances at soundness and longevity. The proposal was sent on to FEIF, where it was approved on an experimental basis



At the NEIHC annual meeting, board members surround their new president, Em Potts, as she cuts the cake (left to right): Cindy Wescott, Brigit Huwyler, Ebba Meehan, Em Potts, Leslie Chambers, and Jess Haynsworth. Photo by Jóhanna Guðmundsdóttir.

for the 2017 show season. At the 2018 Sport meeting this winter, FEIF decided to extend the experiment for another two years. If you plan to use alternative hoof protection at the NEIHC show, make sure that you read up on the rules so that you know what's been approved and what hasn't. I'm happy to answer questions about my experience with nonmetal

hoof protection, as this will be my second year competing in the approved options. You can reach me at [madrivervalleyicelandics@gmail.com](mailto:madrivervalleyicelandics@gmail.com).

After the lecture, the annual meeting began, with 29 members in attendance. After thanking the outgoing board members, Martina Gates and Caeli Cavanagh, the new board introduced themselves. We then discussed the upcoming NEIHC Open show, as well as brainstorming ideas to raise money for our youth fund and making plans for upcoming promotional events such as Equine Affaire. It was wonderful to be able to bounce ideas back and forth in person.

Once the official meeting concluded, Guðmar Pétursson delivered a Powerpoint presentation about trekking with horses through his business in Iceland. Plenty of good food and conversation followed, including a fabulous cake decorated with the NEIHC logo.

There were also several clinics and other fun events this quarter. Dísa Reynisdóttir and Guðmar Pétursson taught at Bel Di Farm in New York for a Spring Tune Up in March. On March 25, Merrimack Valley Icelandics had a beach ride



NEIHC members on a beach ride in Massachusetts (left to right): Kate Kalan, Charity Simard, Ebba Meehan, and Phebe Dodyk Kiryk. Photo by Debra Benanti.



Sirius member Kerstin Lungren enjoys a summer ride on Galdur from Unicorn Valley.

on Crane's Beach in Massachusetts. From April 6-8, Guðmar and Ebba Meehan taught a Spring Clinic at ANJ stables in Byfield, MA. And from May 5-6, Thor Icelandics in New York will be hosting a clinic with Carrie Lyons Brandt.

Carrie will also teach a pre-show clinic June 20-22, before the Sixth Annual NEIHC Open Show, which will take place from June 23-24, both at Thor Icelandics. This is a USIHC-sanctioned competition—and the only one in the Northeast this year, so don't miss it! Registration information will be posted to our website, [www.NEIHC.com](http://www.NEIHC.com).

From July 27-29, Carrie Brandt and Caeli Cavanagh will be teaching an exclusive clinic at Thor Icelandics using the Knapamerki system—the first here in the U.S.! Knapamerki is the Icelandic Riding Level program, developed by Hólar University in Iceland, in order to build and

develop both the theoretical and practical knowledge of Icelandic horse riders.

Finally, the Northeast will have its first breeding show in several years this summer, from August 3-4 at the Cobleskill Fairgrounds in New York. The judges will be Nina Burgholtz and Jens Füchtenschnieder. Contact Martina Gates for more information at [martinagates@mac.com](mailto:martinagates@mac.com).

We look forward to a great spring and summer season in the Northeast!

## **SIRIUS (OHIO & KENTUCKY)**

*BY SHERRY HOOVER*

The Sirius Ohio Kentucky Icelandic Horse Club is excited to announce our new officers for 2018: President Sherry Hoover, Vice-President Narnia Kay, Secretary Frances Rospotynski, and Treasurer Constance Wilmoth.

The club members are excited to attend the 25th Ohio Equine Affaire, April

12-15 in Columbus, OH. We are hosting the Icelandic horse stall and sharing booth space with the Knights of Iceland. This will be a great event and a fun place to promote our breed. We are thankful for the copies of *The Icelandic Horse Quarterly* and USIHC brochures, as well as the financial support provided by the USIHC Promotion Committee. Another thank you goes to the USIHC for their partnership with Horses of Iceland (<http://www.horsesoficeland.is>.) Due to this partnership, we have received numerous promotional materials and movies from Iceland that we can use at Equine Affaire.

The Sirius Ohio Kentucky Icelandic Horse club has a new brochure that highlights fun facts and photographs of our members and their horses. One fun fact is ... the Icelandic horses owned by our members is more than double the number of members. Yes, it's true! You just can't have one Icelandic horse. Our brochure also shows our new logo designed by Kim Rospotynski. Kim is the daughter of our club secretary, Frances Rospotynski. Thank you Kim!

This spring and summer we look forward to many trail rides and meeting at USIHC-sanctioned breed evaluations, shows, and clinics.

## **TOPPUR (IOWA)**

*BY VIRGINIA LAURIDSEN*

Toppur members gathered at the Iowa state fairgrounds April 6-8 for the annual Iowa Horse Fair. It was a smashing success! We had a beautiful booth with brochures from the USIHC, informational cards about Toppur, and videos from Horses of Iceland. With 10 horses, 12 riders, and several other people to man the booth, we were active participants. We did three breed demos and two stallion presentations, had horse and riders in the Parade of Breeds, presented in the Gaited Breed demo, participated in the Extreme Trail Challenge, and performed an Icelandic Drill Team routine. Wow, it was a busy weekend!

The weather in Iowa on Friday was abysmal. We nicknamed the outdoor covered facility the "Ice Arena." Amazingly,

some hardy souls ventured out to see our flawless Harry Potter-themed drill team routine and breed demo. We used the opportunity to practice. As usual, the crowds were impressed with the horses. Most in the audience had never seen a tölt and were struck by the friendly nature of our equine friends.

Fortunately, Saturday brought sunshine, and the forceful winds abated for the day, which brought large crowds to visit the fair. It was a big day:

Gosi frá Lambastöðum started the momentum with the stallion presentation and he was a star! With his beautiful mane and calm demeanor, he was a stand out from the other breeds. I had to explain to many spectators that he is not a miniature Friesian.

Next up was the Toppur Icelandic Breed Demo in the "Ice Arena." It was very well attended! We were able to demonstrate the versatility of the Icelandic, armed with eight horse-and-rider teams. Gosi and I astounded the spectators. I was able to crawl under and over him and even stand on his back. Not many stallions would stay still long enough for that in a hectic environment with mariachi music playing! Dave Ferguson and his lovely

mare Lyfting frá Hallkelsstaðhlið demonstrated the smooth tölt and were an inspiration for all. At 80 years old, Dave is living the life we all hope to lead, riding daily and enjoying life to the fullest. Jan Franck with Gnyr frá Morastöðum and Diana Thrift with Flauta frá Ytri-Valdarási showed the crowd that Icelandics are the perfect leisure horses. Both of the horses were responsive and willing. Next to enter the ring were Liz Clemens riding Hlér frá Gullberastöðum and Lisa Blumhagen riding Hetja vom Pfaffenbuck II. The pairs showed off some impressive dressage movements and tölt speed changes. They were in perfect harmony! Liz Appel and Djásn frá Miðkoti were able to show that Icelandics can even jump. As a former "whipper-in" for the Moingona Foxhunt, Liz was able to teach Djásn to jump in less than a week. I rode Gunnhildur frá Kollaleiru to demonstrate the five natural gaits of the breed. She was awesome! At 19 years old, she still has amazing speed and movements. What fun to ride. Finally, Daniela West joined us riding Gosi, and we all grabbed a stein for the beer tölt. The crowd applauded in appreciation as we lifted our glasses to this special breed.

At noon we all gathered in the main

pavilion for the Parade of Breeds. Daniela West and Hlér represented the Icelandic breed with panache. They caught all of our attention with impressive side passes in the tölt!

Icelandics were also well represented in the Gaited Breeds demo by Dave and Lyfting, Liz showing Flauta for Diana, and Virginia riding Koldimm frá Miðási. Audiences are always impressed by Dave, and Flauta was a show-stopper with her striking pinto color and lovely demeanor. Koldimm earned the attention of the "big horse riders" with her hair flying in a loose-rein fast tölt.

The day ended with our Hooves in Harmony drill team presentation in the main pavilion. We earned a prime time slot this year (right before the rodeo!) and had excellent attendance. Our theme this year was Harry Potter. With eight horses draped in pennants, and riders dressed in robes and scarves from the Hogwarts houses, it was fun to watch. We rode to a musical medley of Hedwig's Theme, the Prologue, Quidditch Match, and Double Trouble. Even with a little human error, we managed to end at the center line for a wave on the final chord. It was a blast! The smiles all around made the effort worthwhile.

Sunday brought snow and low attendance, but Dave and Lyfting and Virginia and Gunnhildur braved the cold to participate in the Extreme Trail Riding Challenge. An obstacle course was set up in the "Ice Arena" and the Icelandic riders proved that they are just as good at dragging tires, going through obstacles, and carrying flags as the Quarter Horse riders in Western saddles. We came back with two beautiful rosette ribbons.

After one last breed demo, we headed home. We were happy to be in the indoor arena as the snow began. Daniela riding Hlér, Liz Clemens riding Gunnhildur, and Virginia riding Gosi demonstrated the wonders of the Icelandic horse, as Virginia gave a Viking history lesson to the attendees. We all were exhausted, but happy to be part of such a friendly Icelandic horse club!



The Toppur Club's demo at the Iowa Horse Fair included a Harry Potter-themed drill team.

# SPORT 101

BY ALEX PREGITZER

With this issue of the *Quarterly* we are starting a new series about sport competition classes, stating the prerequisites, describing how they are ridden and how you can practice or prepare, and explaining what the judges are looking for. Partly I'm speaking from experience, as I'm a USIHC Sport Judge B, but for this installment I've also had input from FEIF International Sport Judges Alexandra Dannenmann and Will Covert, as well as USIHC Sport Judge B Jana Meyer.

When I picked the classes to start with, I first looked at some show results to see which classes are most popular. Over the last few years, T7 Novice Tölt and T8 Youth Tölt have proven to be very popular in the U.S. The following information is intended to help you decide if one of these is a good class for you and your horse to compete in and, if so, to help you get the most out of your show experience.

The prime judging criterion in both T7 Novice Tölt and T8 Youth Tölt—and, indeed, for all Icelandic horse competition classes—is the harmony between horse and rider. When assessing your performance, the judges will look at these key elements:



Judge Will Covert gives feedback to Jamie Blough at the 2017 American Youth Cup. Photo by Mike Hendricks.



Laurie Prestine on Straumur frá Enni showing a harmonious tölt at Flying C Ranch. Photo by Heidi Benson.

riding skills and connection, beat and balance, suppleness and relaxation, outline and movements, and correctness and precision of the execution. Each of these elements is described in detail below. But first, let's compare the two classes.

## T7 NOVICE TÖLT

This class is highly popular, with many entries in each USIHC-sanctioned show. Why? It is not too challenging, in that horse and rider only have to show one gait: tölt. A less confident or less balanced rider may feel safer at the tölt than the trot or canter, while some horses may have trouble trotting or cantering (depending on their gait distribution) and most Icelandic horses can tölt. Even more important, tölt is *the* gait for us Icelandic horse lovers. What better way to show off your horse than at the tölt? Plus, in one part of the test, you can choose your speed, and in this way show off your horse using the speed your horse likes best.

Another reason for the popularity of T7 Novice Tölt is that it's a group class. Many horses do better if they are not alone on the track. Many riders also like riding together with others better than being out there all alone. In this class, the speaker will announce exactly what to do when: As a rider, you don't have to memorize anything. Finally, this class is not open to professionals or to more advanced compe-

tion riders, which makes it less intimidating for those who are not.

Now for the rules. First, tack: In the novice division, the use of bits is limited to snaffle bits only.

Second, eligibility: Any non-professional rider who has not achieved a score of 5.0 or higher three times, riding the same or a different horse, in a tölt class at a USIHC-sanctioned competition, can ride in T7 Novice Tölt. In other words, a rider who has achieved a score of 5.0 or higher three times must advance to the Intermediate level in tölt. You can still ride as a novice in four-gait or five-gait, until you receive three 5.0-or-higher scores in those disciplines.

Third, how is this class ridden? Unless you are the only rider who signed up to ride in T7 Novice Tölt, you will be riding in a group of riders. There won't be more than four riders on the track at once. If more people sign up, there will be several groups.

Your group will be asked to show: 1. Slow tölt. 2. Return to walk and change rein. 3. Any speed tölt.

What does slow tölt mean? Slow means fairly slow. Riding a true slow tölt is not easy. You still need to ride with energy, otherwise the tölt will likely get sluggish and not have much expression. It helps to envision that you are slow enough to ride a small circle (about 30 feet in diameter) without having balance problems. Maybe try that at home. You can also look at competition videos on



YouTube to get a good feel for what a slow tölt looks like. If you have an experienced trainer or riding instructor, you can ask their feedback as you are riding. Am I too fast? Too slow? The more feedback you get, the better your own feel for the correct speed will be. This way, you develop your own muscle memory and won't need to rely on any help during your test. Once you find the right speed, make sure your speed is even. Speeding up and slowing down is not desired, unless you need to correct yourself.

The slow tölt part of T7 Novice Tölt is the most challenging part, since you cannot pick the speed. You would want to be riding this part of your test on your better side (meaning your horse's better side), so keep that in mind when you register for your test. That is the time to pick your rein (the direction you start on). If your horse is better going to the left, you don't need to say anything when you register, as all classes start to the left unless specified otherwise. If your horse is better going to the right, make sure you make a note when you register. It should say that you want to be in a right rein group, if possible. That group will start out going to the right, and you would then be on your good side for the harder portion of the test.

What does any speed tölt mean? Any speed means literally just that: You can go at whatever speed you like. In most cases, going very slow or very fast will not be beneficial, though, because your goal is to show your best tölt. Therefore, pick the speed that shows off your horse's tölt the best.



Intermediate rider Mike Kooyman shows tölt on Hreyfing frá Minni-Borg in the 2017 NEIHC Open. Photo by Jean Ervasti.

This is the speed that your horse is most balanced at when tölting, the speed that feels easy for your horse. It's the speed that allows your horse to tölt in a clear four-beat rhythm, without getting pacey or trotty. It's the speed that won't make your horse roll in the corners. This speed is different for each horse, but many horses do well with a slow to medium-speed tölt. If you work with a trainer or instructor, you can have them watch you ride before the show and discuss the ideal speed. If you ride by yourself, try to feel what tölt feels best and easiest for both you and your horse. This is the speed you want to ride for this part of the test. Again, keep the speed even. Speeding up and slowing down is not good.

### **T8 YOUTH TÖLT**

The next class to take a look at is T8 Youth Tölt. This class is highly popular for all the same reasons as T7 Novice Tölt. However, there are three big differences between the two classes: 1. T8 is for youth riders only. 2. There is only one speed of tölt shown in this class—any speed tölt in both directions. 3. There is no restriction to snaffle bits in this class.

You may wonder why novice classes and beginning rider classes are limited to snaffle bits, but youth classes are not. As Will Covert explained to me, these rules were put in place to protect the horses (and the riders, too) in beginner and novice classes, since those classes are designed for less-experienced riders. Youth riders may be rather inexperienced—in which case a snaffle bit is still usually the most appropriate



Young riders Finja Meyer-Hoyt (left) and Amelie Maranda showing team spirit and friendship as they await the ribbon ceremony at the NEIHC Open at Thor Icelandic. Photo by Jean Ervasti.

choice of tack. But Youth riders may also be extremely experienced. They may have the soft hands and connection that are prerequisites for the use of an Icelandic shank bit or another similar bit with leverage. A very experienced youth rider may score as high as a 10—but she would still not move out of the youth division. Riders only advance out of the division when they reach the age of 17. For this reason, there are more choices of tack in youth classes.

The T8 Youth Tölt class is open to riders 16 years and younger. They may be split into classes according to the following age groups: 1. Eleven years and under. 2. Twelve through sixteen years

Like T7, T8 Youth Tölt is a group class. Unless you are the only rider who signed up for this class, you will be riding in a group of riders. There won't be more than four riders on the track at once. If more people sign up, there will be several groups.

The class consists of: 1. Any speed tölt. 2. Return to walk and change rein. 3. Any speed tölt. See the discussion of what speed is the best to choose in the section on T7, above.

### **WHAT ARE THE JUDGES LOOKING FOR?**

As mentioned above, the harmony that exists between the horse and the rider is the prime judging criterion in an Icelandic horse show. To assess your ride, the judges break it down into five elements: 1. correctness and precision of the execution; 2. riding skills and connection; 3. beat and

balance; 4. suppleness and relaxation; and 5. outline and movements.

### 1. Correctness and Precision of the Execution

This is a key element that is often looked at first. Are you riding the gait you are supposed to be riding? It sounds easy, but it is not always easy. Your horse may be töltng great at home, but forget all about it when you are being passed by other horses on the track. The energy of riding in a group of horses can change everything—for good or bad. You may not have any tölt left, or you may have the best tölt of your life. A lot depends on the horse: its disposition and energy level, its experience, its balance, and the nerves of both horse and rider. If the speaker is asking you to show slow tölt, for example, the judges will look around to see if all the horses are indeed töltng and töltng slowly. The speed of the gait being ridden should be the speed that is asked for, and it should be an even speed (no speeding up or slowing down unless that is part of the test).

### 2. Riding Skills and Connection

If you are riding the correct gait and speed (correctness of execution), the judges will now look at your riding skills and at the teamwork between you and your horse. Is there a good connection between horse and rider? Are you helping your horse? Are you disturbing your horse? Are you riding proactively, or are you a passenger? Is the horse responding to your aids? Is your horse happy with the rein connection and your aids, or are there some problems, such as a lack of cooperation or the horse fighting the bit (such as, open mouth, head shaking,

going against the rein, or trying to avoid the rein contact all together)? It is always a treat to see a harmonious ride with excellent riding and a good connection between horse and rider.

### 3. Beat and Balance

When assessing the quality of the gait, the judges first check if the horse has good balance and a clear beat. They like to see a consistency in keeping the gait—you don't want to break into trot in the middle of your tölt test. Is the horse showing a clear four-beat tölt? Or is the tölt somewhat pace-beated or trot-beated? Are there other balance problems, such as rolling? Is there any unevenness in the steps or are the strides even? Ideally, your horse is showing a good beat with great balance and rhythm and even strides, and is able to keep the gait throughout the performance. (For a primer on trotty tölt and pacey tölt, see "Beyond Tölt" in Issue One 2018 of the *Quarterly*.)

### 4. Suppleness and Relaxation

Is your horse relaxed doing what is being asked of him, or is he tense? Signs of tension could be champing at the bit, a stressed expression, tail swishing, head shaking, excessive sweating, etc. A relaxed horse has a happy, contented expression. Is the horse supple throughout his body, or are there signs of physical tension, such as a stiff or hollow back, a high form etc.? Suppleness and relaxation often go hand in hand. A horse can be physically stiff, but not tense, and still be very happy. But more often than not, a horse that is tense won't be physically relaxed. The judges like to see a very supple, elastic horse that is unconstrained.

### 5. Outline and Movements

Finally, the judges will be looking at your horse's movements. How is the energy? Are the steps big and wide, or rather small? Does the horse move his whole body, or mostly just his legs? Is the walk flowing through the whole body? Is the hind-end active and engaged? Does the horse move in a healthy way—is he in a nice and correct frame? What is the physical outline of the horse? The horse's outline changes somewhat with the gaits that are being ridden, but a faulty form (for example, a very high head set, a hollow back, and disengaged hindquarters) is not desirable in any gait. Ideally, the horse has roomy and high movements, is energetic with good impulsion, a well engaged hind and a light front, a weight-bearing back, and is in good self carriage.

### BEFORE THE SHOW

Before you register for one of these—or any classes—at a show, make sure to take a good look at the show schedule. Pick classes that are not scheduled too tightly, so that you have enough time to get your horses ready, warm them up properly, and also cool them down properly.

Because we drive such long distances to compete, we want to take advantage of each show day and get a lot of rides in. That can be good practice, and you will get a lot of feedback. But sometimes less is more. Think about how much time it will take you to get your horse groomed, tacked up, and warmed up. You should have enough time to enjoy the weekend, without getting stressed out. Your horse should have a good experience and not get overwhelmed, either. Especially for a younger or older horse, a show can cause stress.

Think about the weather conditions when you make your plans. Could it be too hot? Will your horse still be shedding or be already growing his new winter coat? Did you condition your horse properly and is he fit? Has he traveled a long distance to get to the show and, if so, has he had sufficient rest? You know yourself and your horse best—put that knowledge to work.

### AFTER YOU RIDE

After your class, one of several different things may happen. If only a few people signed up for the class, you will likely be asked to remain on the track and come together for an immediate ribbon ceremony. If there are several groups of riders in the class, you will be asked to leave the



At the 2017 American Youth Cup, Eva Dykaar on Mári frá Kolgerði and Isabelle Maranda on Tígull frá Hrólfstaðahelli practice for a pairs class. Photo by Heidi Benson.



Young rider Susanna Rose Clawson showing a happy tölt on Elskan frá Bakka at Flying C Ranch. Photo by Isaac Dwyer.

track, wait until all groups are done riding, and then come back in for the ribbon ceremony.

There may be a final for this class. Most shows in the U.S. only have finals for the individual classes (such as V1, T1, T2, and F1); however, the conducting of a final round in the Novice Classes is at the discretion of the show organizer. If there is a final, it would either be later that day or the next day, and the class will be the same structure. The show schedule will be your source for information on all classes and will say what finals are planned (those classes will be marked with the words FINAL).

In the ribbon ceremony after the ride, the five best riders will receive a ribbon that reflects their placing in their class. At the same time, the speaker will announce each rider's placement and score. Your score tells you more about your performance than your place; you can use your score to track your improvement over a period of time.

Many shows will print the scores and publish them the same day. The results of all USIHC-sanctioned shows are posted on [www.icelandics.org](http://www.icelandics.org). The published results, as well as the announced scores, may provide information on each part of the test (in finals) or only your total score

## LEARN MORE HERE

Anybody who wants to compete in an Icelandic horse show will find that there is a wealth of information available online. The USIHC, as well as FEIF, the International Icelandic Horse Association, have numerous documents on their websites, and I highly recommend you take a peek at them.

On the FEIF website ([www.feif.org](http://www.feif.org)), you can find anything you need to know (and much more than that): regulations on animal welfare with regard to competition riding, the age limit for horses qualifying for sports competitions, the tack you may or may not use in sanctioned events, what pants or boots to wear, how long your whip may be, how to choose the rein you will be riding on, what the judges are looking for, descriptions of each gait of the Icelandic horse (as well as possible faults within those gaits), deductions for a late transition, how the horses should be trimmed, how many riders you can expect to be riding with you, and much more. There are hundreds of pages of information, but fortunately you don't have to read all of them: just pick and choose what is of interest to you.

On the USIHC website ([www.icelandics.org](http://www.icelandics.org)), you will find excerpts from the FEIF website (such as class descriptions), but even more important are the modifications that the USIHC has made to accommodate our specific situation here in America. For the most part, we follow the FEIF rules and regulations, but there are a few exceptions. For example, our shows are not required to have as many judges to be sanctioned. It would simply be too costly otherwise, considering the size of our country. In addition to the FEIF classes (all of which can be offered at U.S. shows), the USIHC also created a number of our own classes, such as beginner four-gait or green horse tölt). Another important modification is that riders are allowed to compete in more than one tölt class (or four-gait class or five-gait class) per event. Considering the long distances people here travel to show, the USIHC aims to give riders more opportunities.

Download the USIHC-Sanctioned Show Rules and Procedures here: <https://www.icelandics.org/competition/sanctionedshows2016.pdf>

The USIHC modifications to the FEIF Sport Rules is also available in a pdf format: [https://www.icelandics.org/competition/competition\\_rules\\_2016.pdf](https://www.icelandics.org/competition/competition_rules_2016.pdf)

Download the complete, official FEIF Sport Rules in a pdf format here: [https://www.feif.org/files/documents/FEIF\\_Rules\\_Regulations2018\\_website.pdf](https://www.feif.org/files/documents/FEIF_Rules_Regulations2018_website.pdf)

Please note that the competition season starts on April 1 each year. Changes to the competition rules, and any other relevant updates (such as the updated FIPO guidelines), will always be published close to that date.

(in preliminaries). If you are curious about your individual scores for each segment of the test, but don't see them published, you can ask the scribes or judges for them.

I would highly encourage you to also ask the judges for individual feedback on your ride, as well as your scores. Judges have a wealth of knowledge, and many are experienced trainers and instructors as well. I am amazed at what they can see and pinpoint. It's best, though, to ask soon after your class. By the end of the day, the judges have seen so many horses that they may not remember your ride. This is especially true for group classes, in which there is

usually not time to write down comments. In individual classes (one rider at a time), the scribes write down lots of comments for each rider.

Also, remember to be polite. If the judges only have a five-minute break, and one needs to use the rest room or make a phone call or is starving, they might be less approachable. There's never a perfect time, but use common sense. I have found that most judges are more than happy to help riders with whatever information they can provide. This kind of feedback is invaluable as you continue in your quest to improve your connection with your Icelandic horse.

# THE ART OF THE NONCONFORMIST

BY KARA L. NOBLE

Chris Romano's favorite original horse cartoon shows four horses, a bay, a palomino, a black, and a gray—none of whom would qualify for First Prize ranking. "Who cares if we have poor conformation?" says the gray to the others. "We're non-conformists!"

It's a sentiment that captures Chris Romano's personality perfectly. Her unique outlook on life and horses, combined with a great sense of humor, have kept her cartoons fresh and funny since she began drawing for the USHC *Quarterly* back in 2007.

"I'm proud to be a non-conformist," she admits.

Chris began developing her artistic non-conformity as a kid in San Mateo County, CA, just south of San Francisco. Her adoptive parents encouraged her originality and creativity.

"My father really wanted me to be an artist," she said. "He emigrated from Italy to the U.S. and fought for the Americans in World War I. Having been through the trenches made him appreciate creature comforts. He had a great love of art, and he nurtured me in that."

Ultimately, though, it was humorous pragmatism that convinced her to pursue an art career. "I had some talent in art," she said, "and I wasn't good at anything else."

## CHALLENGES

In 1972, Chris entered the University of Washington, where she double majored in art and history. To succeed in her career as a visual artist, she had to overcome a major physical challenge. Chris was born with a rare genetic eye disorder, familial bilateral exudative vitreoretinopathy (FEVR), which prevents blood vessels from forming properly in the retina. When she started college, her vision was 20/200, compared to 20/20 normal vision. "My vision was such that I couldn't really paint people," Chris explained, "so I did landscapes. I wanted to express the Sierra Nevada mountains in my paintings, the ranches and local plants that surrounded me."

Her interest in local landscapes in-



Chris Romano and her Icelandic horse Stigandi II from Saga California (US1988100437), better known as "Fudgy." The two have taken many treks and trail rides together—and Fudgy has inspired countless cartoons.

creased significantly in 1974, when she met and married Bruce Pucket, a computer programmer, and moved to the Silicon Valley. Bruce was an avid backpacker. Together they hiked miles of trails in the Sierra Nevada and the canyons of Utah. In the 1980s, the pair made their way to Arizona, where they taught briefly at a boarding high school in Sedona between backpacking trips.

The couple returned to the Bay Area in the 1990s, where Bruce began teaching at the community college level. Chris continued her work as a professional artist. She illustrated a couple of textbooks, a Sierra Club guidebook, and a few stories. She did professional landscape painting for years and sold her art in commercial galleries.

Horses came into their lives when they bought a farm in Woodside, CA that came with a 28-year-old mare. "We weren't going to turn her out," Chris said. "She lived with us for four years. We backpacked, so she did too. We started packing with her in an 80,000-acre state park, Henry W. Coe State Park, which is a couple of hours from our home."

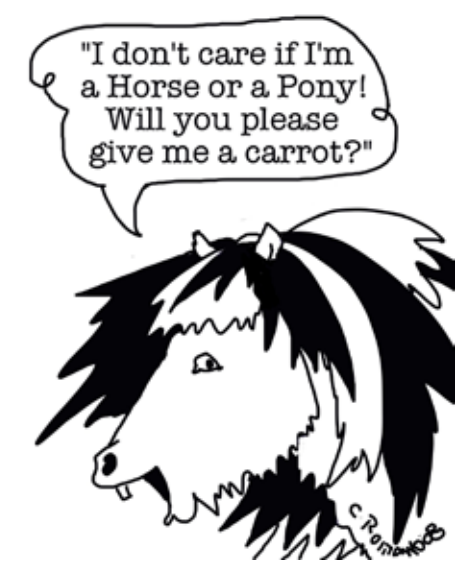
The mare and those early horse packing trips renewed Chris's childhood love of horses. "After I saw the TV show *Fury* when I was little, I would get on my knees and

rear and whinny, pretending to be a horse. I would play horsey endlessly. I drove my family nuts.

"I was a sickly child, isolated and unable to make friends. I was teased mercilessly. My mother bought me plastic horses to play with, and I would draw horses, but not realistic ones. I begged for a pony. Eventually my parents bought an old, swayback pinto mustang for me and my sister to ride. In seventh grade, I began to cartoon swaybacked old horses."

For a while, it looked like Chris's return to horses might be short-lived. Complications from cataract surgery that included a lens implant induced glaucoma in her right eye, and ultimately blinded that eye. Severe cataracts in her left eye reduced her vision to 20/1600. "I used a white cane in town," she said, "but I could still ride." In 2000, surgery removed the cataract and restored enough of the sight in her left eye to allow her to paint and backpack again, and even to drive.

As her parents aged, she took on caregiver responsibilities and began to work in her family's commercial property management business. She and Bruce bought a couple of Paso Finos and continued horse packing trips together too.



Since 2007, Chris has been contributing Icelandic horse cartoons to the Quarterly. At 12 to 16 cartoons printed per year, her archive now numbers well over 100. Here are some of her (and her editor's) favorites.

**ENTER FUDGY**

Chris didn't know much about Icelandic horses until 2002, when a friend bought Stigandi II from Saga California

(US1988100437), a black, 16-year-old Icelandic gelding.

"It turned out [my friend] just wanted a horse she could walk on, and there's no

way that horse just wanted to walk. On top of everything, she kept him in a tiny pen. Bruce and I went down to help her. I would ride out with her. Her poor horse was miserable; I felt so bad for him. One day she was on him, and he was really uncontrollable. He bolted. I told her, 'I'll pay you whatever you paid for him.' I took him home that day."

Chris renamed her new Icelandic "Fudgy," and quickly learned that the best way to stop him from bolting was to keep him busy and carry a carrot with her at all times. With help from Bruce, she trained Fudgy to be a reliable trail horse who could be ridden safely in a halter. She and Bruce regularly took him horse camping amid the region's Douglas firs and redwoods. Fudgy joined the San Mateo Volunteer Horse Patrol, where they worked to keep trails clear and to help people who got lost. Chris taught Fudgy how to be a pack horse, and twice trekked into the high Sierras with him.

"Fudgy thought snow was fascinating. It was cute, watching him scoop it up with his lower lip, like a snow plow, to eat it. It was great to see him rolling in the frost and running around in a temperature that was fit for an Icelandic."

Fortunately, Fudgy was not the horse who ate some miniature locoweed on one of their pack trips into the Sierras. The Paso Fino who did got quite sick. In the face of an oncoming storm, Chris and Bruce were forced to make a harrowing descent through Emigrant Gap, a steep, rugged trail used by people hurrying to the California Gold Rush.

But it was Fudgy who got bit by a rattlesnake. (See Issue Three 2011 of the *Quarterly* for details.)

## ICELANDIC FRIENDS

Isolation proved the biggest downside to owning an Icelandic in the Bay Area back then. During her search for an Icelandic horse community, Chris discovered Nancy Marie Brown's book *A Good Horse Has No Color*. She loved it, and wrote Nancy an email fan letter. Chris was thrilled when Nancy replied with information about the USIHC. Encouraged, Chris sent Nancy a picture of Fudgy that she had rendered in Adobe Illustrator. Nancy liked the "Confetti Horse" image well enough to put it on the cover of Issue Two 2007 of the *Quarterly*.

Chris followed up by submitting some cartoons she had created for the newsletter



Chris Romano also contributes occasional illustrations to the *Quarterly*. This one she drew for a story on the eruption of the volcano Eyjafjallajökull in 2010, but we didn't have room to print it—until now. (It's a favorite of *Quarterly* editor Nancy Marie Brown's.)

of the San Mateo County Horseman's Association. They were a hit, and her original cartoons have appeared in the *Quarterly* ever since.

In 2013, a detached retina temporarily blinded Chris's left eye too. After emergency surgery and weeks blind and bedridden, she emerged with her sight reduced to a tunnel-vision circle with a 15-degree radius. "It's like looking through a monocular," she told me.

To overcome her vision limitations when cartooning, Chris uses a digital tablet or computer to enlarge the images so they're almost a foot long while she's drawing, and even bigger when she's refining and revising. To compensate for her narrow field of view in real life, she backs up. "My vision is like a camera. I back up to get a larger field of view until I can see what I'm trying to find."

When she's looking for cartoon ideas,

she heads to the barn. "If I spend time with horses, something usually comes into my head from the horse's point of view. Fudgy is a cartoon natural."

Chris didn't expect to become a cartoonist, but she's grateful for the chance to draw for the *Quarterly*. "I'm 65 now, and Fudgy is 31. With my limited eyesight, I don't know if I could do landscapes anymore, and packing out with horses isn't a good idea. I have a couple of houses I am fortunate to rent out, and I take care of my renters—it's important to be kind—but now my work life is mostly filing.

"I'm lucky to be able to do the cartoons, to express myself creatively. And I'm lucky to be able to be with Fudgy. It's nice to have an Icelandic as a friend."

And it's nice to have a non-conformist cartoonist who can show *Quarterly* readers what the Icelandic horse world looks like through her very special eyes.

# BREEDING INSPIRATION

BY VIRGINIA LAURIDSEN

**T**he USIHC Breeding Committee and a few other interested Icelandic horse owners gathered at Red Feather Icelandics on March 23-26 for a seminar with Arnar Bjarki Sigurðarsson. The goal was to expand our knowledge base and strategize about how best to shine the spotlight on domestically bred Icelandic horses.

Red Feather Icelandics is nestled beneath the spectacular scenery of Mt. Hood in the state of Washington. The seminar was open to all USIHC members and the majority of the Breeding Committee was in attendance. Our committee is primarily composed of new appointees, who are eager to learn and have a positive impact on breeding in the United States. Committee chair Linda Templeton organized the seminar and provided each participant with housing, meals, and a full set of the general rules and regulations on breeding Icelandic horses compiled by FEIF, the USIHC's parent organization. We gathered in the classroom, armed with paper and pen, computer, projector, screen, and of course, delicious food and drink. It was an inspirational weekend!

## MEET ARNAR BJARKI

Arnar Bjarki is somewhat of a superstar in the Icelandic horse breeding world. At 22, he was named a FEIF International Breeding Judge—the youngest person ever to earn that distinction. Since Arnar's appointment five years ago, he has evaluated over 1500 horses. Quite a resume! Add to that his winsome personality and superb teaching style, and you have a very impressive young man. Everyone in attendance was energized by Arnar and motivated to be a better breed ambassador for the Icelandic horse.

We began the seminar with an extensive lesson on genetics and the history of Icelandic horse breeding. We delved into phenotyping, homozygous and heterozygous genes, and the effect of environmental factors. After our crash course in gene expression, we discussed Mendelism and quantitative versus qualitative traits. Of course no seminar in Icelandic breeding



Baldur from Sand Meadow (US2017105171) is a product of Andrea and Steve Barber's breeding program. His dam is the first-prize mare Sædís frá Melabergi (US1997203565) and sire is the first-prize stallion Sporður frá Bergi (US2005104746). The Barbers were so pleased with the outcome that they are repeating the breeding. Photo by Andrea Barber.

is complete without a tutorial on the "gait keeper" gene, DMRT3. (See the articles in Issue Three 2013 and Issue Four 2012 of the *Quarterly*.) Arnar taught us about the varying levels of heritability found in the gaits and conformational components of the Icelandic horse. Most importantly, we learned about the factors affecting genetic progress of the breed.

## BREEDING GOALS

FEIF is working to educate breeders around the world to preserve the unique characteristics of the Icelandic horse and to improve the breeding stock. Genetic variation, accuracy of selection, selection intensity, generation interval, and inbreeding depression are all important considerations for breeders.



Arnar Bjarki measures a horse's height: The ideal size is 135-145 centimeters at the withers (or 13.1 to 14.1 hands), with an optimum of 142-144 cm (14-14.1 hands).

Arnar stressed that each breeder should have a stated breeding goal. With a specific type of horse in mind, the breeder can make better choices when selecting stallions and mares. The general breeding goal of FEIF is to produce a "healthy, fertile, and durable" horse. The ideal size is 135-145 centimeters at the withers (or 13.1 to 14.1 hands), with an optimum of 142-144 cm (14-14.1 hands). However, Icelandics are multi-purpose horses, and breeders may choose to focus their efforts on a specific use of the horse such as competition or leisure. This will also keep the gene pool sufficiently varied.

All breeders should strongly note a horse's conformation, since clear gaits depend on form and balance in the horse's body. If a horse has good conformation it will move better and be easier to train. A "light" body with emphasis on strength is encouraged. Arnar stressed the importance of breeding horses with

self-carriage, which will enhance a horse's ridden abilities.

Finally, FEIF is also aware of the necessity to preserve the many color varieties found in the Icelandic horse. The roan horse for instance has become quite rare, and the silver dapple is known for having eye problems, so the breeder needs to cross it with other colors.

Next we discussed the use of the BLUP (Best Linear Unbiased Prediction), which was implemented in 1986. The BLUP is an algorithm based on a genetic file. It gives a statistical model for the genetic transmission of a horse's normally distributed traits. Although it is a prediction, not an assessment, it is nonetheless a valuable tool.

All members of the USIHC have free access to WorldFengur, which offers a wealth of information, including the BLUP, assessments, and evaluations for every registered Icelandic horse in the world. Aspiring breeders can use

WorldFengur's "Virtual Mate Selection" or "Select Stallion" tools to do research. Users can limit their search by county, BLUP score (total or specific gait or conformational element), and inbreeding coefficient. Even if you aren't a breeder, it is fun to investigate possibilities using WorldFengur! (See the how-to articles in Issues Four 2016 and One 2017 of the *Quarterly*.)

## EVALUATIONS

On Day Two of the seminar, we focused on the registration of Icelandic horses and on what happens at a breeding evaluation.

It is commonly believed that only half of the Icelandic horses in the world are registered in any FEIF registry. This greatly limits our knowledge base about the breed. Any research conclusions about health, usage, and areas of population can only be made from the horses in the registry. Unfortunately, many owners do not see the value of registering their horses. This is something we all hope to change. A better knowledge of the total Icelandic population will only increase the accuracy of scientific assumptions and enhance our ability to offer helpful insight to the average Icelandic horse owner. Suggestions for improving our registration percentage included a registration drive and encouraging breeders to register horses for clients at the time of sale.

As for breeding evaluations, three are scheduled in the U.S. this year! Since there have not been any in recent years,



At 22, Arnar Bjarki Sigurðarsson was the youngest person ever named a FEIF International Breeding Judge. Since then he has evaluated over 1500 horses.





Arnar Bjarki demonstrates the measurements taken during a breeding horse evaluation. By the end of the seminar, every participant had measured a horse.

we are all excited about this prospect.

Arnar gave us an in-depth lecture on how a FEIF breeding judge evaluates both the conformation and the ridden abilities of an Icelandic horse. We learned the procedure for a health check and the measurements taken. By the end of the seminar, every participant had personally measured a horse.

We discussed the importance of filing paperwork, such as stallion and mating reports. Arnar showed us how to do a testicle check and to search for the microchip; a microchip is now required for all horses presented at an evaluation.

We perused the “Working Rules” and discussed the duties of the judges, show manager, speaker, and scribe. With the 2018 FEIF rules just released, the timing was perfect!

Finally Arnar used videos of spectacular horses as a tutorial for judging the gaits. He showed us what he looks for in footfall and form. One of the new approaches this year is to place less emphasis on pure speed and more emphasis on the horse’s responsiveness to the rider. For instance, a horse that cannot be stopped will receive a maximum of 7.5 for spirit. A rider who uses a harsh correction will be given a yellow card. Two yellow cards and you are out. FEIF is intent on demanding safe and good horsemanship from all.

## HIS BEST ADVICE

Day Three was reserved for “hands on training” for all of the participants and a Q&A session with Arnar.

I asked him to give me his best advice for an aspiring breeder. He replied:

Breed the best horses you can, particularly the mare.

Do your research and know the horses. Honest, unbiased information from a trainer and rider is invaluable and will tell you much more than just numbers.

Handling is crucial. The environment where the horse is bred, raised, and trained will weigh in almost as much as genetics.

Arnar encouraged *everyone* to have their horse evaluated, even if it is a gelding. Assessments teach us a great deal about what we are breeding. If only a few horses are assessed, then our education is highly limited.

We discussed ways to make evaluations less stressful and less expensive. Since the United States covers such a vast geographical distance, we face our own set of challenges. There is also a lack of certified Icelandic trainers in the country to help those interested in having a horse evaluated. The process can be a bit overwhelming for the novice. The USIHC

Education Committee is currently working on a U.S. trainer certification, which will certainly be helpful. Hopefully with more tracks, trainers, and better communication, we can ease the difficulties one might encounter when having a horse evaluated.

It was heartening to hear that FEIF is focusing attention on good breeding practices, good horsemanship, and good training. Arnar encouraged us to create a safe environment for our horses and to be attentive to our handling of them. With thoughtful breeding goals, careful attention to genetics, and good training techniques, we can *improve* the breed. We should all encourage fellow Icelandic horse owners and riders to register their horses and to have them evaluated. More participation in both will give us a much greater pool of information about the breed. No matter what your discipline is, more knowledge is a good thing.

The USIHC has declared 2018 to be the year of “better communication.” Attendees at the annual meeting in Denver can attest to the determination of the board to be more interactive with all members. If you are a breeder or hope to be in the future, the Breeding Committee would like to hear your ideas! Contact us at [breeding@icelandics.org](mailto:breeding@icelandics.org).



Yes, you should look a gift horse (or any horse) in the mouth. Here Arnar Bjarki shows the attendees at the USIHC breeding seminar exactly what to look for.

# TO BREED APART

BY KARA L. NOBLE

“I don’t actually *have* a breeding program—*yet*,” Heidi Benson said. “I am *creating* a breeding program.”

The foundation of that breeding program is Heidi’s extensive experience. “I’ve been involved in many aspects of the horse industry for most of my life. I’ve spent the last 23 years training, competing, and teaching with Icelandic horses. But what I’m most drawn to is breeding. I’ve still got things to learn about breeding Icelandics, but I have enough experience with them and with breeding other types of horses so I’m not going into this blindly.”

Breeding horses is a tough business and Heidi knows it. “Breeding is possibly the hardest aspect of the horse business,” she said. “There’s no money in it and no guarantees. It’s based on hopes, dreams, and a lot of research. If you don’t feel it in your heart to breed horses, if you aren’t ready to work hard and take some risks, then you shouldn’t do it.”

Heidi has the desire; she’s longed to breed horses since she was given a small gaited horse when she was eight years old. By the time she was 12, she was teaching riding lessons and training other people’s horses to pay for the cost of her own. By the time she was 13, she was promoting and breeding her own Arabian stallion. “My goal was to have a farm where I would breed and train the finest horses. I memorized famous breeding lines and wrote to renowned breeders. I had high hopes my stallion would become famous enough that I could buy my farm. Of course, that’s not the way it worked, but I learned a lot.”

## A SECRET WORLD

In 1996, Heidi discovered Icelandic horses at the Equitana international horse exposition. She was captivated by the breed. “I loved their curious nature and honest work ethic. I was impressed by their spirit and intelligence, their fierce survival instinct and self-awareness. I was also intrigued by the strong culture surrounding them, the balance of horsemanship and pride Icelanders



Heidi Benson’s stallion Strokkur frá Syðri-Gegnishólum (US2007105266). “To me,” says Heidi, “he represents everything an Icelandic horse should be.” Photo by Heidi Benson.

exhibited when it came to their horses. I felt like I’d found a secret horse world I never knew existed. I wanted more than anything to be part of it.”

Her first step was to learn more about the breed. “I had a lot of catching up to do to understand the unique aspects of the breed. I worked hard and took advantage of every opportunity to educate myself about Icelandics, to learn how to train them and teach with them.”

The more she learned, the more she dreamed about breeding them. As a seasoned horse professional, she knew dreams weren’t enough.

Heidi keeps her horses at a public boarding stable in Santa Cruz, CA, where she operates Centaur City Icelandic Riding School. She built that program from just three horses into one of the largest Icelandic horse communities in the United States, and last year she hosted the American Youth Cup. But what’s good for a riding program isn’t necessarily workable for a breeding program.

“It’s kind of ridiculous to consider a breeding program here,” Heidi admit-

ted. “I don’t own land. I don’t have a place to raise foals. I don’t have a place to keep a stallion.”

Even so, there was one thing she could do to move toward her dream of



Heidi with Neptúnus from Sæstöðum (US2017105262) and his mother Skila from Tolthaven (US2003202389). Photo by Isaac Dwyer.

breeding Icelandics: research.

“I’ve been pestering breeders in Iceland for five or six years now. I go to their farms and ask a million questions. I’m so fortunate I know the people I know in Iceland, that they’ve been willing to help me.”

Icelandic breeders taught her the value of good broodmares. “I dream of owning a ‘power mare,’ a queen who is capable of reproducing her genetic strengths over and over through her offspring and their offspring. I’ve learned it’s not difficult to improve the offspring of a poor or average quality mare in one generation. What’s difficult is improving the offspring of an exceptional mare generation after generation. That takes skill, knowledge, gut instinct, and vision.”

She discovered such a mare at Syðri-Gegnishólar in Selfoss, Iceland, where breeder Oilil Amble and her husband Bergur Jónsson run a successful breeding program built around Álfadís frá Selfossi.

“The quality and the consistency with which Álfadís reproduces herself in her children and her children’s children is amazing,” Heidi said. “When I saw it, I thought to myself, ‘this is what a true foundation mare looks like. I want to make a horse like that.’

“The horses that come from Álfadís and her sons and daughters are talented, strong, and beautiful, with an amazing temperament. They’re all highly evaluated, but can be ridden and handled by riders of many levels. That’s the kind of horse I want to breed, the kind I believe would be successful in the U.S. market, so I decided to base my breeding program on horses bred by that farm.”

## GETTING CREATIVE

Buying a daughter of Álfadís to bring those bloodlines into her new breeding program wasn’t an option. “None of her daughters are for sale—and if they were, I’d have to win the lottery to afford one,” Heidi said.

Undaunted, she began looking for the right opportunity to breed her favorite mare, Birta from Icelandic Horse Farm, a four-gaited palomino. She found it in 2014 when the stallion Sporður frá Bergi came to Léttleiki Icelandics in Kentucky. Sporður is a grandson of Álfadís frá Selfossi; he offered an affordable way

into that power mare’s bloodlines.

“I realized I might never have greater financial security or own my own farm,” Heidi said. “I decided the time was right and I got creative.”

She shipped Birta to Kentucky. In 2015, the mare’s breeding with Sporður produced the blue-eyed, chestnut-and-white filly Nikíta from Sæstöðum (featured on the cover of *Quarterly* Issue One 2018). Birta remained in Kentucky and was rebred to Sporður in 2016. In 2017, Heidi shipped Nikíta and Birta to Tamangur Icelandics in Colorado. A second filly, Nína from Sæstöðum, was born there in 2017.

Back in California, Heidi leased a five-gaited mare, a daughter of Höldur frá Brún and granddaughter of Kolfinnur frá Kjarnholtum I, who she bred to a son of Orri frá Þúfu. That breeding produced a colt, Neptúnus from Sæstöðum, in 2017.

Then another opportunity surfaced. “Since I couldn’t afford a mare who was closely related to Álfadís, I decided to consider a stallion closely related to her instead. I chose Strokkr frá Syðri-Gegnishólum. His mother, Grýla frá Stangarholt, is also the mother of Álfadís. Strokkr is charismatic, with amazing spirit and playfulness; he loves to have people around him. His gaits are strong and balanced and he moves with enthusiasm. To me, he represents everything an Icelandic horse should be.”



Neptúnus from Sæstöðum (US2017105262) combines the bloodlines of two famous stallions, Orri frá Þúfu and Höldur frá Brún. Photo by Isaac Dwyer.

## BEING PATIENT

Heidi made the difficult decision to keep Nikíta and Nína with Birta in Colorado so they could grow up in the kind of herd environment she considers essential for the body and mind of a foal to develop correctly. It was the right decision for the horses, but one that was tough on the breeder. “It’s been very hard not to see my foals grow up. I’m a bit of a control freak when it comes to my horses, so trusting others to handle them and make sure they receive proper



Nikíta from Sæstöðum (US2015205087) is the offspring of Heidi’s favorite mare, Birta from Icelandic Horse Farm (US2000202299), and the stallion Sporður frá Bergi (US2005104746), a grandson of the mare who represents Heidi’s breeding goal. Sporður stands at stud at Léttleiki Icelandics in Kentucky. Photo by Heidi Benson.



Nína from Sæstöðum (US2017205267) resulted from the rebreeding of Birta from Icelandic Horse Farm (US2000202299) to Sporður frá Bergi (US2005104746). Heidi shipped Birta and her earlier foal, Nikíta, to Tamangur Icelandics in Colorado, where Nína was born, so the foals could grow up in the kind of herd environment essential for their bodies and minds to develop. Photos by Heidi Benson.

care was difficult.”

She followed her foals’ growth and progress long-distance, mainly through photographs. She didn’t meet Nikíta until the filly was two years old. “Meeting her was very exciting for me. She was so beautiful and curious, so full of spirit, just as I hoped she would be.”

That gives Heidi one mare, three promising foals, and a stallion with excellent bloodlines—five horses who comprise a positive start to fulfilling her breeding goals. It’s a good beginning, but she admits she won’t know how much progress she has made until she has her foals evaluated.

“I plan to have all my foals evaluated, and, going forward, I plan to breed only to evaluated Icelandics. Our breed evaluation system helps breeders gauge the quality of their stock; it’s an essential tool I intend to use in designing my own breeding program. I want my program to help promote more widespread use of the domestic breed evaluation system.”

It will be another year before she is ready to have the first of her foals evaluated. But Heidi knows good breeding



can’t be rushed.

“Establishing a solid breeding program is going to take me 10 years. But I believe if you find the right horses and do your research, if you are patient, you can create something that’s long-lasting and high-quality. Many professionals have worked hard to grow this breed in the U.S. I want to contribute to designing and producing a line of domestic-bred Icelan-

dic horses that will bring more varied and exciting options to the growing number of Icelandic horse hobbyists, professionals, and enthusiasts here.”

Nikíta sealed Heidi’s commitment to breeding. “Those first few moments in the field with her and her mother reinforced my desired to keep breeding these horses, no matter how creative I have to get to do it.”



Heidi and her daughter, Ayla Green (right), offload the stallion Strokkrur as he arrives in California. “It’s funny,” Heidi notes, “I have never liked pinto horses. Now all of my horses are pinto! I kind of have to like pintos now.”

# NEW RESEARCH AT CORNELL

BY LAUREN CAHOON ROBERTS

Thanks to some creative thinking, dogged persistence—and a herd of Icelandic horses—the stage is set for developing the first effective vaccine for newborn equines.

Developing vaccines for foals has been frustratingly elusive, explains Bettina Wagner, whose research at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine in Ithaca, NY has been featured in the *Quarterly* several times. The neonate immune system is thought to be underdeveloped and thus unresponsive to traditional vaccination methods. But in recently published work, Bettina and her colleagues triggered partial protection and an increased antibody response against equine herpes virus-1 (EHV-1), a highly prevalent pathogen that can induce life-threatening equine disease.

Bettina made the first step of this discovery by accident—in fact, it started as an unwelcome data point. She had been measuring immune-modulating markers, or cytokines, in immune cells of newborn foals for a different study, assuming that none would be present. However, in some five-day-old foals, she detected the cytokine IL-4.

"I didn't expect to see this—and at the time, I didn't want to see it," Bettina laughs. "It destroyed my experiment—so it took me a couple of days to get into the mindset and acknowledge that something unusual was there."

With the new shift in thinking, Bettina set out to discover why those immune markers were made early in the foal's life. "I thought, if this happens consistently in foals there must be a reason," says Bettina. She decided to use this mysterious mechanism to drive neonatal vaccinations.

## THE CORNELL HERD

In order to test this idea out, Bettina needed an equine population that was certain to be EHV-1-free, so she turned to her herd of Icelandic horses. Brought to Iceland by the Vikings, the Icelandic horse evolved free from many of the diseases and pathogens that exist elsewhere.

It is considered one of the world's purest breeds.

Bettina had imported horses from Iceland in 2012 to establish a research herd. When the new foals were born, Bettina's team gave them an EHV-1 vaccine designed to activate the IL-4 cytokine. Unexpectedly, the vaccine failed to yield any detectable antibodies against the disease.

Next they tested the foals' immunity seven months later during weaning—a high-stress period for foals that often results in EHV-1 susceptibility. The researchers exposed the foals to the virus—and again, the outcome was less exciting than expected. "All the foals got sick," Bettina says. "There was only partial protection from the vaccine we gave them as newborns." The vaccinated foals had a slightly lower fever, but no other clinical differences.

Despite the lackluster response, Bettina persisted—she collected blood samples to examine the antibody response. "That's when it really became interesting," she says. "There was a very clear and dramatic difference between the foals that were vaccinated and the controls. Vaccinated

foals had much earlier and higher antibody responses."

## THE NEXT STEP

Why would foals fail to show antibody production when first vaccinated, but show a dramatic response seven months later? Bettina believes the early vaccination triggered the foals' innate immune system by creating memory B cells specific to the EHV-1 antibody. These long-lived immune cells do not create antibodies initially, but will do so when challenged later with the same virus.

The next step for Bettina and her colleagues is to improve this vaccination method so that it provides clinical protection and an antibody response that occurs directly after vaccination. Their approach will be to target a broader array of immunologic pathways in addition to the innate-driven IL-4 response.

*Bettina Wagner is professor of immunology and associate dean for research and graduate education at Cornell's College of Veterinary Medicine. This research was funded by the Harry M. Zweig Memorial Fund for Equine Research, and published in the January 2017 issue of PloS One.*



For Bettina Wagner, the study proves the worth of her herd of Icelandics. "When I first proposed using them as a research model, most people said it was a crazy idea." Now they are considered a valuable research asset to the College of Veterinary Medicine.

# HORSE SPEAK

BOOK REVIEW BY NICKI ESDORN

**H**ave you admired certain people who seem to have an effortless dialogue going on with their horses? They don't usually "say" much in words, but have a calm and deliberate way about them, and the horse seems to trust and understand them. Sharon Wilsie's book *Horse Speak: The Equine-Human Translation Guide*, co-authored with Gretchen Vogel and published by Trafalgar Square Books, decodes this dialogue and gives us the "words" to understand our horse's language and even "speak" to them. The book promises "Conversations with Horses in Their Language."

Horses, of course, do not talk like Mister Ed! (I'm dating myself: How many of you know that TV sitcom from the 1960s?) Sharon, a professional animal trainer and rehabilitation expert, spent years observing the highly ritualized language of horses, a language consisting of body language, energy level, deliberate gestures, and breath. *Horse Speak* is not a training manual, but a practical system for listening and talking to horses in their language, not ours.

## BUTTONS

The book is a mixture of profound philosophy and simple hands-on exercises. In the foundation chapter you first learn to say "nothing" by finding your "zero," and then practice levels of intensity of speaking. Most of us do not use breathing much as a communication tool, but horses do! In this section, the facial expressions of the horse are also explained in detail, with many photos.

Sharon has identified 13 areas on the horse's body that she calls "buttons"; these are the ABCs of horse speak. Focusing on, touching, or pressing those buttons mean specific things to the horse. For example, the "go away face" button is found at the back of the horse's cheek, under his eye and ear. However, many people push the horse's head away between the muzzle and the jaw, slightly above where the bit ring sits. This area is the "play" button! Touching it means "play with me" to the horse, and has the opposite effect of what the person intended.

## CONVERSATIONS

Sharon calls the main topics of communication with horses the four Gs:

"Greeting" is how one horse meets another horse, you, or some other animal. It sets the tone for further interaction.

"Going somewhere" entails movement, minor or major, moving or being moved. It is pretty amazing how subtle horses can be. Every little gesture, from moving a foot to flicking an ear, is full of meaning. If we learn to understand these gestures and become more precise in our own positions and movements, training becomes a lot easier.

"Grooming" is a mutual invitation for touch. If we recognize and wait for a horse's consent to be touched, we have a better chance for a close and friendly connection.

"Gone" is the horse's way of saying, "I am done with this!" or even a flat-out "No." It is certainly important to be able to recognize that message!

The four Gs are explained in many examples, with the horse on a halter and lead rope, at liberty, and under saddle.

## COMMUNICATION

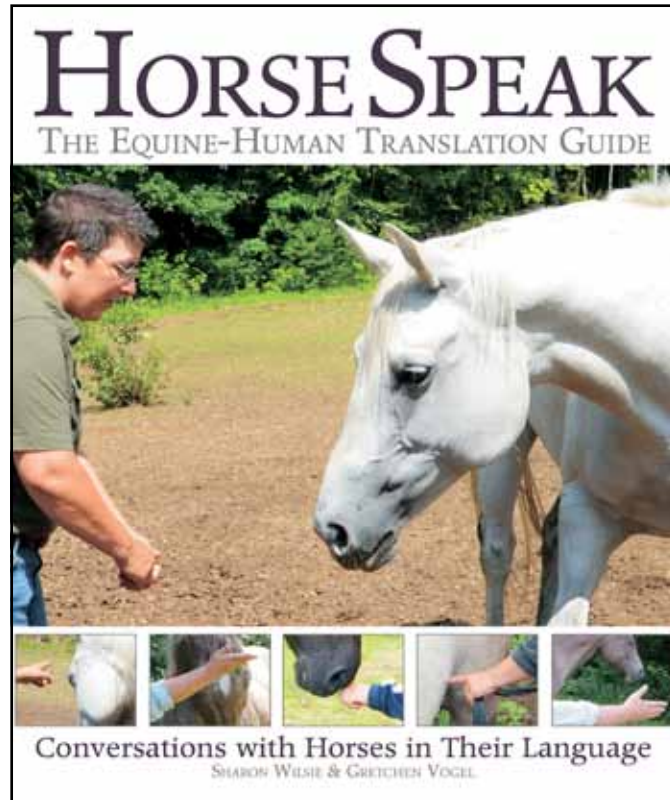
*Horse Speak* contains a wealth of information, illustrations, and photos. Not

knowing much of our equine partner's language will inevitably result in confusion, frustration, and even dangerous situations. Here is a well-written, entertaining, and practical guide to better understanding and true communication.

My mares seemed to appreciate and respond kindly to my efforts. We have to keep our sense of humor and stay humble—the horses are the masters of this language and we are just the apprentices. It is fun and rewarding to learn to know what your horse is "saying" and to be able to respond and be understood. It can make all the difference in training. With a little effort we can now all become fluent in "Horse Speak"!

## RESOURCES

A CD with examples of "Horse Speak" will come out this spring, and another book by Sharon Wilsie, with many different case stories, will be published soon: *Horses in Translation*. Find more information on these websites: [www.wilsiewayhorsemanship.com](http://www.wilsiewayhorsemanship.com) and [www.horsespeakthebook.com](http://www.horsespeakthebook.com).



# CENTERING

BY ALYS CULHANE

By now, many riders have some familiarity with Centered Riding, for founder Sally Swift's books *Centered Riding I* (published in 1985) and *II* (2002) have sold over a million copies worldwide. As a returning rider—someone who took to riding horses at an early age, then after a lengthy hiatus, resumed riding—I learned about it later than most. I didn't discover Centered Riding until 2006, when I attended a TTeam clinic at the Icelandic Horse Farm in Vernon, British Columbia.

TTeam is a system of training horses that was developed by Linda Tellington Jones in the mid-1970s. The Tellington Team Method is comprised of three components, TTouches (a type of bodywork or light massage), ground exercises, and mounted work. Centered Riding, founded by Sally Swift at about the same



Alys practicing a Centered Riding exercise at a clinic with Susan Harris and Peggy Brown in 2017. Photo by Pete Praetorius.



Alys Culhane on her "opinionated" mare Raudi, with her friend Mariann, discover a field of fireweed on the trail. Photo by Pete Praetorius.

time, complements TTeam training in that both approaches emphasize horse and human body awareness.

Linda's mentor was Moshe Feldenkrais and Sally's was F.M. Alexander, two individuals who, in slightly differing ways, asserted that awareness through movement activates neural pathways. This, in Moshe's words "enhances balance and therefore our ability to be efficient and safe in any situation." In Centered Riding, this focus on body awareness and balance is expressed through the "four basics," these being Centering, Soft Eyes, Breathing, and Building Blocks. In this article, I'll feature centering; in the future, I hope to introduce you to soft eyes, breathing, and building blocks.

## BEING CENTERED

Centering, broadly defined, is a way to calm yourself physically, mentally, and emotionally, usually in preparation for an activity that requires a high degree of

concentration. Centering is often equated with meditation, particularly in relation to bringing awareness to your physical self. For example, while in a meditative state, you might notice that your shoulders and back are tight. In bringing your focus to these areas, you can release the habitual tension that has accumulated over time. Changes then take place in other areas of the body. Breathing slows, eye and face muscles relax, and the body's building blocks align themselves. Centering, then, enables you to interact with both human and equine counterparts in a more confident and effective fashion.

I began applying the techniques of Centered Riding on a daily basis in 2007, when we acquired Tinni, our then 17-year old Icelandic gelding. My goal was to become a more experienced rider when it came time to back Raudi, who was then three. The tenets of Centered Riding complemented my belief that the rider's and the horse's physical and

mental being were inextricably linked. The self-directive that I relied upon the most was centering, which is core-related. First bringing my awareness to my core made it possible for me to then bring my awareness to my alignment, vision, and breathing.

In *Centered Riding I*, Sally draws parallels to being off center and off balance. She writes, "If you watch someone riding and he looks off balance, jerky, or stiff, it is almost always because the center is wrong. The rider is usually behind his own balance and behind the motion of his horse. If he can get the center correct, the rest will fall into place."

And so, when I felt myself going into a C position, that is with my shoulders hunched forward and my legs up, I would "point (my) fingers at my belly, to the spot between my navel and pubic arch," in Sally's words, for here was my center of balance, energy, and control.

I envisioned a ball in my core and practiced moving it forwards, backwards, to the sides, and diagonally, in what Sally



A happy Alys and a relaxed Raudi on the trail in the Happy Jack area in Wyoming in 2014. Photo by Pete Praetorius.



Practicing trot at the Centered Riding clinic in 2017. Photo by Pete Praetorius.

describes as "the following seat," in order to keep Tinni in balance and moving forward. I first pictured a green tennis ball, but after taking a few Tai Chi lessons, I began to envision my ball as a bright yellow sun.

A reliance upon the use of such imagery is integral to Centered Riding. The Greek term for this is *ideokinesis*: *ideo*, meaning thought, and *kinesis* meaning movement. This now popular term in movement science circles was coined by Mabel Ellsworth Todd, the author of *The Thinking Body*. Sally writes about Mabel's influence on her work in the introduction to *Centered Riding*. She relates that when she was eight, she was diagnosed with scoliosis, or lateral curvature of the spine. Sally worked with Mabel until she was in her early twenties. Mabel encouraged Sally to take up riding, for this would better enable her to use both sides of her body equally.

The premise of *ideokinesis* is that the mind and body are interconnected: calling a specific mental image to mind brings about physical changes. Says Sally, Mabel used "a great many images for teaching, such as squatting down and walking like a duck or when walking

upright, dragging an imaginary alligator's tail along the ground."

Other body movement specialists have since advanced these ideas. For example, Eric Franklin, the author of *Dynamic Imagery*, suggests that the more vivid the image, the more effective it will be, because the brain is then better able to make neural associations.

## COMMUNICATING

My having spent time practicing Centered Riding on Tinni made it possible for me to ride Raudi, who I had purchased as a foal. Otherwise, we most likely would have had to part company. Raudi has a very different personality than Tinni: She is willful, or what Centered Riding instructor Susan Harris calls "opinionated." I quickly discovered that demanding that Raudi do what I asked would usually lead to a fight, with her being the victor.

Centering myself first, and then envisioning what I wanted her to do worked far better. For example, one day young Raudi refused to go up and down and up a shallow ravine. I knew that this portion of the trail was safe because I'd crossed it on Tinni numerous times before. I tried putting Natural Horsemanship guru Tom Dorrance's adage, "Keep the feet mov-



ing,” to use, but to no avail. Raudi planted her feet and refused to move. I finally pictured the yellow sun at my center shrinking in size and moving forward. Raudi lowered her head, snorted, and headed downhill.

Centering is as important when on the ground as it is when in the saddle. I came to this realization in 2008, when Raudi was five. She was reliable under saddle, less so on the ground. She’d sometimes forge ahead, push her shoulder into me, yank the lead rope out of my hands, and gallop off.

My realization that I could no longer ignore my mare’s wanton behavior occurred in 2010, at the conclusion of a Competitive Trail Ride. A CTR is a three-day event in which trail riders are judged on horsemanship, conditioning, and trail riding abilities. Riders must also finish the designated route in a pre-determined amount of time. I’d waited at our trailer before heading to the evaluation area because I knew that Raudi, who wanted to graze on the sparse grass, would drag me around. I also knew that fighting with her would raise her pulse and respiration, two of the most important veterinary-related evaluative criteria.

Raudi stood quietly while being examined. The horsemanship judge then told me to walk out to an orange cone and lunge her. Raudi moved to the perimeter of the circle and pulled the line out of my hand. I put my hands to my face as she bucked, squealed, and galloped at top speed back to the trailer.

“Well, I guess that’s the grand finale,” the NATRC judge drawled. I stood rigid as the 30 or so onlookers laughed loudly. I then, with shoulders slumped, slunk



Trotting out at a vet check during a Competitive Trail Ride in 2017. Photo by Pete Praetorius.

back to our camp. I attempted to sell Raudi to a friend for a dollar, but, as she said, “A dollar is too much money for a runaway.”

In *Don’t Shoot the Dog*, Clicker Training maven Karen Pryor suggests that when all else fails, go back to kindergarten. I returned to pre-school and resumed doing TTeam work with Raudi. I routinely worked with her in the differing leading positions, walked her over obstacles, and did TTouches, soft circular massage movements that increase sensory awareness and have a calming effect. In time, Raudi became more relaxed when I was leading her outside the pen.

I made a big deal about her progress and even arranged for a preschool graduation ceremony. I gave the commencement speech and then took her for a walkabout on our residential road. As I was humming *Pomp and Circumstance*, I had an “aha!” moment. I foresaw that Raudi’s and my communication would be vastly improved if I centered myself while on the ground. I rolled my sun forwards, backwards, and diagonally. Raudi moved in unison with me. “Sweet!” I exclaimed. Right then, our on-the-ground relationship took a turn for the better.

## THE MOUNTAIN HORSE

I feared doing another CTR on Raudi because I’d since become a part of Bald Mountain Butt Buster CTR Lore. Yes, I was the woman whose poorly trained, spoiled pony had taken advantage of her. This, I knew, had reduced my credibility in terms of my advocacy for positive reinforcement, TTeam, and Centered Riding techniques.

My husband convinced me to do the CTR by offering to come along, riding Tinni. His reasoning was that the older black gelding would be a calming influence on the younger chestnut mare. The only CTR-related glitch occurred midway on the first morning’s ride, shortly after Raudi and I came to an unmarked trail intersection. Raudi and I went right, taking the uphill route. The terrain became increasingly steeper. It had rained all night, and so the trail was fairly slippery. We came to a downed tree 15 minutes later. I dismounted and tied Raudi to a limb, ducked under the tree, and proceeded to check out the trail on foot, stopping when I came to a huge rock. I deduced that the only way to continue would be by going



On a Competitive Trail Ride in 2016, Alys and Raudi enjoy their partnership—and get a good view of the Knik Glacier. Photo by Pete Praetorius.

up and over it, which given its size and placement on the trail was an impossibility. I did an about-face and made my way back to Raudi and the group of 14 or so riders who’d followed me up the hill. The last in line was my friend Heather who was riding Rio, Raudi’s trail buddy.

“It’s a no-go,” I said to the waiting riders. All decided to dismount and lead their horses down the now extremely slick slope. I also elected to lead Raudi. My heart pounded loudly, for I feared that Raudi would yank the reins out of my hands and take off to join Rio, now separated from us by 13 horses. Rather than imagine that scenario, I centered myself by envisioning us being on our road loop. I began to hum *Pomp and Circumstance* and brought my awareness to my legs and feet. I lightened my death grip on the reins. I dropped my bright green and blue alligator tail and made my yellow sun large and diffuse, so as to lower my energy level. I then rolled it backwards, slowly.

Raudi and I finished the morning’s ride in the allotted amount of time. She was no longer referred to as Alys’s spoiled pony, but rather as her fearless hill-climbing mountain horse. I was pleased, for the new moniker was more apt for an Icelandic horse.



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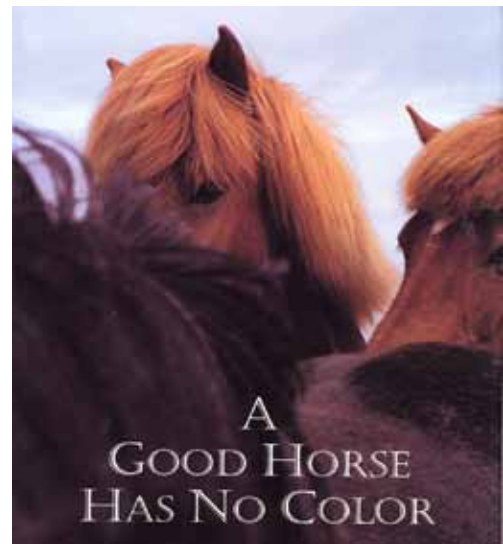
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2012 Performed with Apassionata's U.S. Tour  
2014 IDA Team Captain & 1st Level Rider  
2015 Graduated Dartmouth Magna Cum Laude  
2018 Graduated Holar Certified FT Trainer and Instructor

## **IN DUBIO PRO EQUO**

words Caeli lives by:  
**When in doubt,  
for the horse**

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