

Issue Two

THE

2019

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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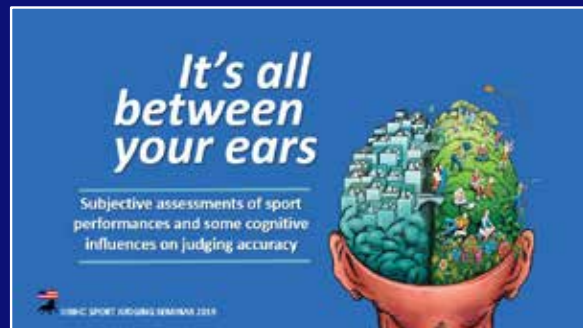
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United States Icelandic Horse Congress

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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), 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.



Photo by Eleanor Anderson

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

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. By joining the USIHC, you connect to a worldwide network of experts to help you care for, ride, train, breed, and learn more about your horse.

The USIHC is the umbrella organization of 16 affiliated clubs: 14 regional clubs and two activity clubs (for breeders and professional trainers). Our Registry links to WorldFengur, the worldwide database of all registered Icelandic horses (USIHC members have free access to WorldFengur), and we publish *The Icelandic Horse Quarterly*, maintaining an online archive of all issues since 2008.

The USIHC sponsors scientific research on the Icelandic horse, helps promote the Icelandic horse at expos and through social media, supports educational seminars and events like the American Youth Cup, organizes leisure activities like the Sea 2 Shining Sea virtual ride, creates teaching tools like the Riding Badge Pro-

gram, and offers practical and monetary support to organizers of shows and clinics.

The Icelandic horse has international competition rules: You can compete in the same classes and receive comparable scores in any FEIF member country. Likewise, 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 ridden abilities. The USIHC sanctions sport and breeding shows that conform to FEIF rules.

The USIHC is responsible for the U.S. teams at the FEIF Icelandic Horse World Championships, the FEIF Youth Cup, and the FEIF Youth Camp. Through FEIF, the USIHC votes on rules and policies that affect the welfare of the Icelandic horse worldwide.

As a member of the USIHC, your dues and registration fees make all this possible. Our board members and committee chairs are all volunteers. As a member-driven organization, the USIHC grows stronger the more active and involved our members become. Please join us so that the USIHC can, as FEIF's mission states, "bring people together in their passion for the Icelandic horse."



ICELANDIC HORSE

Q U A R T E R L Y

THE ICELANDIC HORSE QUARTERLY
Issue Two 2019

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On the cover: An iconic show photo
by Eleanor Anderson, with lots of mane
glamour (only improved by the red gloves
and blue bling). The first-prize stallion
Geysir frá Kvistum (US2012105376),
owned by Cathy Luo, shone with trainer
Laura Benson at the Sæstaðir Spring
Show, achieving the show's highest
score. A stallion with exceptional tem-
perament, he was also shown in Youth
Tölt by 16-year-old beginner rider Jackie
Harris. For breeding info, contact Valkyrie
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USIHC NEWS

2019 SHOW SEASON

The Sæstaðir Spring Classic, held March 23-24 at Coast Road Stables in Santa Cruz, CA, was the first USIHC-sanctioned show of the year. Will Covert was the judge, and there was a good turnout, with 27 horse-and-rider combinations.

Several shows were scheduled for May: the CIA Open Spring Sanctioned Show, May 4-5, at Flying C Ranch in Santa Ynez, CA; the Locust Hill Gamankeppni, a “fun and educational” Sanctioned Show, May 11-12, by Taktur Icelandics in Prospect, KY; the Léttleiki Icelandics Sanctioned Show, May 25-26, in Shelbyville, KY.

June 8-9, the Flugnirgæðinga (a non-sanctioned show, since the Icelandic gæðingakeppni rules are not yet part of FEIF) will be held at Tolthaven Icelandics in Pelican Rapids, MN.

June 21, the NEIHC Dressage Schooling Show will be held at Thor Icelandics in Hudson, NY, followed by the 7th Annual NEIHC Open, a USIHC-Sanctioned show, on June 22-23.

June 29-30, the NWIHC planned its first USIHC-Sanctioned show, to be held at Red Feather Icelandics in Trout Lake, WA.

Two shows will occur July 20-21: one at Solheimar Icelandics in Tunbridge, VT, and the North American Youth Cup at Red Feather Icelandics.

Later in the summer and fall, these shows are planned: the Flugnirkeppni Show, August 24-25, at Tolthaven Icelandics in Pelican Rapids, MN; the AIHA Sanctioned Show, September 14-15, at Arctic Arrow Farm in Wasilla, AK; the Solheimar Open, September 21-22, at Solheimar Icelandics in Tunbridge, VT; the KYIHS Triple World Ranking Show, including three separate World Ranking Events on October 4-6, at Léttleiki Icelandics in Shelbyville, KY; the CIA Open Fall Sanctioned Show, October 12-13, at Flying C Ranch in Santa Ynez, CA; and the Frida Icelandic Show, October 26-27, at Montaire in Middleburg, VA.

For more information on these shows, see the USIHC calendar online at www.icelandics.org. Show results are posted online at <https://www.icelandics.org/showresults/>.

USIHC BUDGET

In 2019, the USIHC is continuing the process of spending down its reserves. The 2019 budget, approved at the February 12 board meeting, allows for deficit spending of up to \$12,000.

As of January 31, the USIHC’s combined bank account balances equaled \$114,886.91; of that total, the unrestricted funds equaled \$102,668.97, which means that deficit spending at the 2019 level cannot continue for more than eight years before our reserves are completely depleted. For this reason, the board decided to revise some funding policies, as detailed below, to begin containing our deficit spending. The relevant policies can be found on the USIHC website at <https://www.icelandics.org/policies>.

Committee requests for 2019, above the “bare-bones budget” needed to run the Registry and Congress office, meet our obligations in FEIF, publish the *Quarterly* magazine, and maintain the website, came to \$14,232.20, meaning that some requests had to be denied.

The board discussed ways to increase our annual income to allow the USIHC to fund more events and projects in the future. Increasing our membership numbers is an ongoing goal. To increase USIHC membership dues requires a membership vote to change the constitution.

USIHC EVENT FUNDING

In 2019, a total of \$3,000 (down from \$3,250 in 2018) has been budgeted to support USIHC-sanctioned sport competitions; an additional \$1,500 (down from \$2,000) has been earmarked to support breed evaluations. This amount will be distributed on a sliding scale for the first three times the event is held (that is, at the same location or by the same organizer). The 2019 sliding scale is: \$750 for the first event, \$500 for the second, and \$250 for the third. For the complete rules, see Policy 30A and 30B.

As in 2018, foal and young horse assessments will not be funded in 2019. In addition, USIHC president Will Covert is looking into ways of containing the cost of supplying the equipment needed to conduct breed evaluations.

To focus USIHC funds on USIHC

members, starting in 2019 organizers of all official USIHC events, including sanctioned shows, breed evaluations, young horse assessments, and judging seminars will need to charge non-USIHC members a \$25 fee; this fee is to be sent to the USIHC with the reporting documents.

CLUB FUNDING

As in 2018, the USIHC has budgeted \$3,500 to support clinics or schooling shows held by USIHC Affiliated Clubs in 2019. Each club can receive up to \$250, or \$25 for each USIHC member participant (up to 10).

The club must send the event details to both the Affiliated Club committee chair and the USIHC secretary (for inclusion in the USIHC calendar of events) no later than 30 days before the event. After the event, the club must submit a list of all USIHC participants, as well as the total number of participants.

For the complete rules and procedures, see Policy 31 on the USIHC website.

FEIF SPORT CHARGES

In 2019, organizers of USIHC-sanctioned shows will need to price their class entry fees to cover two FEIF charges. Show organizers will need to reimburse the USIHC, at the rate of \$1.80 per horse/rider combination, for the cost of using FEIF’s IceTest scoring software. Organizers of World Ranking shows will need to reimburse the USIHC for FEIF’s \$95 fee per World Ranking event, double if FEIF charges the USIHC a late fee.

LEISURE RIDING

The Leisure Riding Committee’s current Sea 2 Shining Sea virtual ride was extended to December 31 to bring the committee’s budget into sync with the rest of the USIHC. Team member swaps will be permitted in July.

Sea 2 Shining Sea Ride centers around a Facebook page, where USIHC leisure riders share their experiences riding Icelandic horses in the U.S. Individuals and teams can win awards for achieving specific landmarks along the virtual route, which currently follows the Pony Express and Butterfield Overland Mail routes. See *Quarterly* Issue Three 2018 for details. Check the

USIHC website for more information on the ride, or join by emailing leisure@icelandics.org. S2SS Riders of the Month are also featured in the *Quarterly*.

PROMOTION

The USIHC will continue as a member of the Horses of Iceland marketing group, at the request of the Promotion Committee. For an idea of what Horses of Iceland does, watch the two-part feature, "Little Vikings: The Horses of Iceland," produced for the TV program FEI Equestrian World (online at fei.org or on YouTube). The Fédération Equestre Internationale is the international governing body of equestrian sports, including Olympic jumping, dressage, and eventing. FEI TV has a global reach of over 238 million viewers, making this one of the biggest promotions for the Icelandic horse to date. "Little Vikings" includes interviews with Jelena Ohm, the project manager of Horses of Iceland; Diddi Bárðarson, a forerunner among Iceland's athletes; Gunnar Sturluson, the president of FEIF; and Guðmar Pétursson of Hestaland stables. Many of the "tourists" in the Hestaland segment are USIHC members.

The USIHC Promotion Committee also received funding to print more USIHC brochures and to continue supporting breed demonstrations at horse expos, as outlined in Policy 21.

AMERICAN YOUTH CUP

The North American Youth Cup biennial USIHC-Sanctioned Show will be held July 20-21 at Red Feather Icelandics in Trout Lake, WA at the conclusion of the Youth Cup week. For more information, contact Caeli Cavanagh at caeli.cavanagh@gmail.com.

The USIHC is supporting the 2019 North American Youth Cup at the rate of \$100 per qualified participant, not to exceed \$2,000. Qualified participants, for purposes of this funding from the USIHC Youth Fund, are U.S. citizens and USIHC members at the time of application through the end of the event. If there is a positive balance after the Cup, Linda Templeton of Red Feather Icelandics, volunteered to return those funds to the USIHC Youth Fund.



The Sæstaðir Spring Show included a stallion presentation class, open to all purebred Icelandic stallions who are registered with the USIHC. From left, Laura Benson on Lykill frá Stóra-Ási, Ayla Green on Geysir frá Kvistum, and Heidi Benson on Strokur frá Syðri-Gegnishólum. Photo by Isaac Dwyer.

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

The 2019 FEIF World Championships will take place in Berlin, Germany from August 4-14. As this issue of the *Quarterly* was at press, the U.S. team was being chosen by video tryout. The U.S. is allowed to send seven riders and up to five additional youth riders; if fewer than seven adult riders choose to attend the Championships, then youth riders may be included in the first seven spots.

The USIHC Sport Leader, Ásta Covert, makes the formal team selection based solely on the video tryout marks given by the judge hired to evaluate the riders. The team is selected by computing the average score of each rider's best results in the required tests. For more information on the selection process, see: https://www.icelandics.org/competition/wc_team.php

The results of the tryouts will be published on the USIHC website, and the riders will be notified by email on

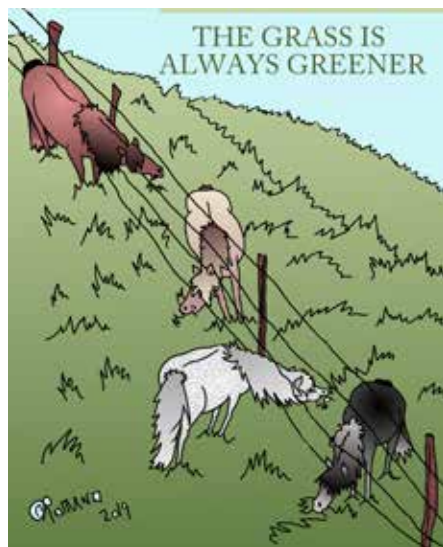
June 10. Members of the 2019 U.S. World Championship team are responsible for all expenses related to their participation.

USIHC VOTING

At its March meeting, the USIHC Board proposed moving to an electronic (email) voting system for such things as amending the constitution or changing membership fees; the Congress already votes electronically to elect the board of directors.

Currently the only way to amend any part of the USIHC Constitution is by a 2/3 affirmative vote at a General Meeting. Our annual General Meetings have on average 20-30 voting members present. This system does not allow the majority of the membership to have a voice in the voting process.

To allow electronic voting, however, itself requires a vote at a General Meeting. For this reason, a General Meeting was called on May 3, to coincide with the 2019 CIA Open Spring Sanctioned Show at Flying C Ranch in Santa Ynez, CA.



FEIF CONFERENCE

The 2019 FEIF Conference took place in Berlin, Germany on February 2-3; it was organized with the help of the German Icelandic Horse Association, IPZV. As in previous years, the conference started with the Annual Delegates Assembly, the highest authority within FEIF.

Fourteen out of the 19 FEIF member countries entitled to vote participated in this year's Delegates Assembly. Several proposals were referred back to the departmental meetings for further discussion, however the majority of those sent out with the invitation in December 2018 were accepted. The trial proposal to add a young committee member (20-26 years of age) to all FEIF committees was welcomed. The Assembly agreed, as well, on changes to the statutes and on the descriptions of the disciplinary board and the doping board. As the FEIF rules on doping require a disciplinary committee of at least three persons from different countries, Caroline van de Bunt (Netherlands, three years), Ólafur Arinbjörn Sigurðsson (Iceland, two years), and Annette Hodel (Switzerland, one year) were elected.

The Assembly also agreed to integrate Tölt in Harmony into the FEIF Rules under the new name Figures Tests. The founders of Tölt in Harmony will cease operations, including the licensing of trainers and judges. For details of the tests, see chapter S5 and S16.11 of the FEIF Sport Rules and Regulations.

The delegates unanimously approved the auditor's report for 2018/2019 and discharged the FEIF Board of Directors. Gunnar Sturluson (President), Gundula Sharman (Director of Youth Work), and Mia Estermann (Director of Leisure Riding) each gave short presentations about their plans for FEIF's next two years and were reelected. Jens Iversen was elected to the Arbitration Council for three years, and Lárus Finnbogason was confirmed as accountant.

Minutes with details on the proposals to the Delegates Assembly are available on the FEIF website. Following are reports from the individual committee meetings.

JOINT MEETING

For the first time, a joint meeting of several departments took place at the FEIF conference to discuss cross-departmental issues: equipment, doping rules and authorities, and the inclusion of Gæðingakeppni in FEIF.

The participants agreed that there is no good reason to have different equipment rules for sport and breeding shows. Going forward, harmonization of equipment rules will not be limited to the so-called red list, but will include all tack and equipment. The FEIF Board will form a committee so that the work can be started; candidates from breeding, education, and sport were proposed.

On doping, the FEIF Board will make

a proposal to the 2020 Delegates Assembly providing clear instructions on how to handle doping cases within the Icelandic horse community. The participants agreed that if a blood sample tests positive for a substance on the FEI Prohibited Substances List in effect at the time of the sample collection, FEIF will automatically impose a ban matching that imposed by the prosecuting authority; all member associations will be obligated to enforce the ban. In case of substances not on the FEI Prohibited Substances List, FEIF will not impose a ban.

A FEIF working group will pursue the idea of including Gæðingakeppni in FEIF.

CHAIRPERSONS

Topics of the annual meeting of FEIF chairpersons ranged from the activities of the member countries' associations, planning the World Championships for 2019 and 2021, and feedback on the FEIF questionnaire, to the activities planned for the FEIF@50 celebrations. Changes to the rotation of the World Championships and Landsmót were referred to the countries for further consideration. Proposed changes to procedures within FEIF were looked at from various angles, and the board agreed to implement some of the ideas discussed. All agreed that a strong focus should be put on the future of FEIF. First discussions with possible new FEIF member countries will be taken up during the next months. Volunteers interested in joining FEIF committees and work groups are welcome at any time; information on open positions will be announced in time for next year's elections.

EDUCATION

Reports on cooperation between FEIF member countries in developing a common structure for judge and trainer education, riding badge systems, etc. clearly showed that the approach of combining forces is beneficial for all and is moving in the right direction. We learned that judge education, for instance, is the responsibility of the education department in some countries, while in other countries it is in the sport department. In only a few cases is there a separate judges department.

SPORT

The national sport leaders, along with representatives from national as well as FEIF committees, discussed the topics of equipment, doping, and Gæðingakeppni in order to present the sport point of view at the joint meeting. The attendees also decided to add the following topics to the agenda of the 2020 Delegates Assembly: 1. the starting order for the second heat in P2 may be the same as the order of the first heat; 2. a new timetable for P2; 3. a more accurate way to calculate the final results (rounding up at the end); and 4. P3 test as a new test at the World Championships. Several proposals—among them the use of markings instead of a funnel in PP1 and PP2, the idea to show the pace sprints in five-gait on the pace track (similar to Gæðingakeppni), showing loose rein tölt on both hands in T2 finals, and leading horses into the start boxes in P1 and P3—were not accepted by the majority of the delegates. The proposal to have Gæðingkeppni at the World Championships was welcomed, and further observations will be made by the committee. Finally, Florian Schneider was re-elected to the sport committee and Susanne Jelinski joined as a new member.

BREEDING

As in previous years, the breeding meeting was one of the largest gatherings. Newly elected members of the committees are Maria Siepe-Gunkel (as representative of the national breeding leaders), Frauke Schenzel (as representative of the breeders), and Heimir Gunnarsson (re-elected as member of the breeding judge committee). Detailed discussions on the proposal for adapted breeding goals and the judging scale for conformation and riding abilities were the main topic on the agenda. The general long-term aim is to breed better riding horses that can perform with ease and lightness. The delegates confirmed the next steps, so that a final proposal can be presented to the Delegates Assembly in 2020. Another proposal for next year's Delegates Assembly will define the rules for the education of breeding ringmasters. The procedure to register warnings and bans at breeding shows was defined and, starting this year, will be observed and published on the FEIF website.

YOUTH WORK

Eleven member associations were represented, allowing each of us to learn how things are done in the ten other countries. The main topics of consideration were social media and the inclusion of more volunteers at local, regional, and national levels in FEIF activities, especially training and education. The use of social media being the particular expertise of young people, the contribution of our young members to the FEIF@50 celebrations is sure to come in electronic format! The requests for FEIF training seminars for non-professionals were loud and clear, and the committee will respond to those requests. What distinguishes a FEIF seminar is the chance to meet and learn from people from other nations, with other points of view, who share the same interests and experiences. Possible topics for such seminars would include aspects of leadership training, communication strategies, and personal development. These are all qualities needed to run successful youth initiatives.

LEISURE RIDING

This meeting focused on what can be learned from the work done within the individual countries to develop leisure riding. The discussions produced a lot of input and ideas, such as a website about riding safety in traffic, leisure camps with clinics, and how to become an educated tour guide. The welfare of the horse was discussed in connection to all activities presented. As a consequence, more links to the leisure pages of the national leisure riding departments will soon be available on the FEIF website. At the end of the conference, we were proud to present the new FEIF Riding Horse Profile video, made in cooperation with Horses of Iceland. The updated forms of the Riding Horse Profile—one for the person looking for a horse, and one for the trainer profiling the horse—are already available on the FEIF website.

SPORT JUDGES SEMINAR

The 2019 Sport Judges Seminar was held on March 16 in Stansted, GB and at the famous Ashfields Carriage & Polo Club, London. Eighty international partici-

pants used the opportunity to study how Icelandic horses create movements in all their gaits. Gillian Higgins of Horses inside Out gave a presentation with live painted horses. An authority in equine anatomy and biomechanics, as well as a professional sports and remedial therapist, Gillian is well known for her anatomical painting on live horses. Following her demonstration, Mette Mannseth and Þorgeir Guðlaugsson gave presentations on biomechanics and locomotion in the context of the FEIF judging criteria and guidelines for sport competitions. They also introduced some innovative methods to increase the accuracy of judgments.

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

The Icelandic Horse World Championships will be held in Berlin on August 4-11, 2019. Go to wm2019.berlin for details and to purchase tickets. Here's the program at a glance:

Sunday, August 4: Official opening ceremony, Parade of Nations, welcoming of relay riders, marketplace opening.

Monday: Breeding competitions (conformation & rideability).

Tuesday: "Day of Inclusion," with a diverse side program; breeding and sports competitions (preliminaries).

Wednesday: "Day of the Schools," presentation of the world of work horses; breeding and sport competitions (preliminaries).

Thursday: Sport competitions (preliminaries); "Day of Breeding," with lectures, seminars, and discussions. Stallion show in the evening. Participating stallions will be presented in a freestyle ridden performance. The audience can vote on their favorites, and the best five will be invited to be presented again during the Saturday night show program "More Horsepower."

Friday: Sport competitions (preliminaries), Icelandic evening with live concert.

Saturday: Sports competition finals; evening show, "More Horsepower," with Jean-François Pignon and others.

Sunday, August 11: Sport competition finals and award ceremony.

CLUB UPDATES

There are two Activity Clubs and 14 Regional Clubs affiliated with the U.S. Icelandic Horse Congress. To find the Regional Club nearest you, see the USIHC website at www.icelandics.org. Contact information for the Activity Clubs can also be found there. The following clubs filed updates on their activities this quarter.

FLUGNIR

By Liz Stimmler

It was a long, cold, and snowy winter in our region of Wisconsin and Minnesota. But as I write this in March, the temperatures are finally above freezing, the record snowfall is melting, and the Icelandics are shedding. Time for us to start the process of working off that layer of winter insulation.

The winter wasn't all bad: Riding in deep snow is good exercise and fun! There were also some frigid days when we just played on the ground in the arena to stretch everyone's legs. Our winter warmup party in January was well attended, too. Great food, friends, and ideas, including an enlightening presentation on Icelandic horse gaits by Kydee Sheetz, with a trivia game to test our knowledge.

With the longer days, though, our riders are happy to get more hours in the saddle, and the horses are thrilled to finally be getting out and about again. Soon we'll be hitting the track and the trails. Our members continually organize events and look for educational opportunities in our area to grow as riders and to share their Icelandic horses with all interested parties.

We have several events planned for

this year, starting with the Minnesota Horse Expo at the end of April. We are especially proud and excited this year to have trainers Carrie Lyons-Brandt of Taktur Icelandics and Laura Benson of Valkyrie Icelandics both as invited presenters. We will also have two rated shows this year, both at Tolthaven Icelandics in Pelican Rapids, MN. The first show will be June 8-9, and the second August 24-25.

GLITFAXA

By Gabriele Meyer

We experienced a very wet winter in the greater San Francisco Bay Area of California, and our trail conditions were challenging. Glitfaxes members mostly just stayed at home, riding in their arenas by themselves. Our first outing was to Santa Cruz on March 23-24 to attend the first USIHC-sanctioned show of the year, the Sæstaðir Spring Classic, held at Coast Road Stables. The show was organized by Heidi Benson of Sæstaðir Icelandic Horses, and the judge was Will Covert. Glitfaxes member Nicki Esdorn participated with her mare Alfrún frá Hrafnsstöðum; she also brought her young mare, Jenny from Thor Icelandics, for the exposure. Glitfaxes members Teresa Halperin, Melanie Bartoletti, and Gabriele Meyer went to cheer them on.

Here is what Nicki said after the show: "After moving across the country from New York to Northern California last year, I was looking forward to attending my first show on the left coast—in the gorgeous location of Coast Road Stables in Santa Cruz,

with a view of the spring green mountains and the Pacific Ocean. It feels good to be welcomed by the Icelandic community here and to meet new friends and their good horses! I had been working with trainer Laura Benson for only a few rainy weeks, but we were eager to show that Alfrún had found her new superpower: flying pace! Laura rode a beautiful green horse five-gait program. They nailed every transition, and with every run Alfrún was more confident to really fly! I got to show her afterwards in her last green horse tölt class. I was proud of all the good training we have done, as she was clearly still jazzed from pacing, but she listened well! My younger mare, Jenny, had a good time showing off in the show ring before and after classes and will be more than ready for the next show. Thank you so much to Laura and Heidi Benson, and to Ayla Green, for all your help and encouragement."

Whether riding or just being a spectator, we had a fantastic time watching all the beautiful horses and skillful riding. We were especially impressed by the demonstration of three powerful and expressive stallions. It was great to have the opportunity to meet and catch up with members from our sister club, Kraftur, and the Sæstaðir team.

Glitfaxes members are looking forward to our next event, which will be a clinic with Laura Benson at the facility of the Novato Horsemen's Association in the San Francisco North Bay area.

HESTAFOLK

By Lisa McKeen

Hestafolk members had a very challenging start to the year. The weather was mild all winter, but come the end of January it all changed. We had freezing temperatures, and the wind from Canada's Fraser River Valley was impressive even to those of us who are used to it. It kept us pinned down in houses and barns, doing ground work or just grooming our horses. Of course, the Icelandics preferred to stand out in the weather most of the time. The snow seemed always welcome to them, and it was rewarding to watch them frolic and play in a storm.

We have members all over the state of Washington and into Oregon. We are trying



Flugnir members Dave and Eve Loftness give their horses a winter workout in the arena.



Left, Hestafolk member Linda Wallitner and Logn from Extreme Farm head to the Red Feather arena for a clinic. Right, Cathy Hinds and Andi from Evans Farm on Chuckanut Mountain trail.



to travel for our meetings so that people don't always have to come to Bellingham. In January, we rode the ferry to Port Townsend and then went on to Judy Skogen's beautiful home in the forest by Quilcene. It's always fun for club members to meet up, and it's really wonderful to get to know one another's places and pets. Hopefully we will have a clinic on the peninsula this spring or summer and do some riding over there too.

Our Hestafolk 4-H group did public presentations in February, and they all did very well. We are planning a parade,

and will be helping out at Vikingfest this summer. The focus of our attendance there is letting the crowd get to know our horses and their rich history. The club also has a retreat trip planned for May in Leavenworth. It's a favorite trip!

KLETTAFJALLA

By Kristina Stelter

The Klettafjalla Icelandic Horse Club (KIHC) is off to a brand new start in 2019 with our brand new president, Jeff Rose. Jeff is highly experienced and brings won-

derful energy to the club. We also have a new board: LeeAnn Ott (secretary), Jeny Feldner and Angie Calve (events coordinators), Angie Calve (treasurer), and Kristina Stelter (*Quarterly liaison*).

We are gearing up for a big year in our Rocky Mountains area: We will have a KIHC 2019 Rendezvous on July 25-28. The event will be held in Fairplay, CO, where we will have fun activities, a parade, and an equestrian exhibition to promote the breed. Keep an eye on our website and our Facebook page for more information. We look forward to seeing you there. In addition to our Rendezvous, we will have a clinic with Ulla Hudson at Wind-song Icelandics in Edgewood, NM on July 12-14; a lightness clinic during the last week of July; and a camping trek in Moab, UT on October 18-21. If you'd like to join any of our events, check our website and Facebook page for information. We also have two KIHC members attending the North American Youth Cup! Look out—we have amazing riders!

KRAFTUR

By Heidi Benson

The Sæstaðir Spring Classic, held March 23-24, was the first USIHC-sanctioned show of the year. It was hosted by Sæstaðir Icelandic Horses, owned by Kraftur member Heidi Benson, at Coast Road Stables in Santa Cruz, CA. Will Covert was the judge, and there was a good turnout, with 27 horse-and-rider combinations.

There were some new additions to the typical list of sanctioned classes and fun classes. The show debuted the new F2 Open Group Five Gait, as well as offering the Gæðingafimi (Icelandic dressage) levels I, II, and III program, which was debuted last summer at the Kraftur Show. There was also a stallion presentation class, open to all purebred Icelandic stallions who are registered with the USIHC.

Members from each of the California Regional Clubs (CIA, Kraftur, and Glitfaxa) were in attendance. Many of the club members who didn't ride came to show their support for the event, and helped with everything from bringing coffee in the morning and taking photos, to gate keeping, scribing, and logging the scores into Icetest.



Klettafjalla president Jeff Rose and Fjaladís from Winterhorse Park.



Three Regional Clubs—CIA, Glitfaxe, and Kraftur—took part in the Sæstaðir Spring Show in Santa Cruz, CA. Top (from left): Deb Avila-White on Lilja from Shaggy Mountain, Eva Dykaar on Lólita from Valkyrie, and Eden Hendricks on Sylgja frá Ketilsstöðum. Middle: Cameron Tolbert-Scott on Skýfaxe from South Spoon Ranch, Ayla Green on Brynjar from Dalalíf, and Julia Hasenauer on Festi frá Kastalabrekku. Bottom: Laura Benson on Alfrún frá Hrafnstöðum; Harriet Rye on Rán frá Möðrufelli, Ayla on Hugrún frá Hellubæ, and Deb on Lilja; Ayla on Hugrún. Photos by Eleanor Anderson, Isaac Dwyer, and Sarah Hitzeman.

An unexpected but encouraging number of spectators also showed up on Saturday to enjoy the show. For many of them it was their first exposure to the Icelandic horse, and there was a lot of positive outreach and promotion of the horses and sport.

On the weekend of April 6-7, several Kraftur members decided to try something different. Our first show of the season was already a couple of weeks past, and there would be six more weeks until the next Icelandic show in Santa Ynez. That was just too long to wait. So we tried out an open gaited breed horse show hosted by the North Coast Horse Association at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds. Six Kraftur members took part, with eight Icelandic horses. There were many other gaited horse breeds there: Tennessee Walkers, Missouri Fox Trotters, American Saddlebreds, Morgans, Peruvian Pasos and more. The show organizer, Marie Boyd, was kind enough to add two Icelandic-specific classes to the show just for us, but we also thought it was really great to show in some of the mixed classes along with the other breeds. It was a fantastic show. It was well organized and ran smoothly, the stabling at the fairgrounds was excellent, people were welcoming to us and curious about our horses, and we even got to demonstrate an Icelandic five-gait class at the end of the day, so people could see all the Icelandic gaits. It was a wonderful day, and we are hoping to attend the summer and fall editions of this show, hopefully with more riders next time.

NEIHC

By Jess Haynsworth

Spring is here, as I write this, that magical time of year when Icelandic horse owners know better than to wear lipgloss while grooming their horses. Winter is a slow period for many of us in the Northeast Icelandic Horse Club, at least when it comes to horseback riding. Still, we have a few great memories to look back on.

On January 19, the NEIHC hosted the USIHC Annual Meeting at the Hilton hotel at Logan Airport in Boston. Leslie Chambers writes: "We expected 33 attendees and had 28, largely due to an impending blizzard, which also cut many attendees' visits to Boston short (except the few who



Hair on the floor is a familiar sight in a spring barn. Not everyone is as creative with it as photographer Jess Haynsworth!

got an extended visit, due to flight cancellations). The NEIHC Board was well represented by Emily Potts, Leslie Chambers, Brigit Huwyler, Leah Greenberger, and Nikkisue Flanigan (who joined our board soon after). Ebba Meehan was unable to attend, but many Merrimack Valley members did make it. The meeting went well, all committees reported, awards were given, and we had two speakers. Nancy Marie Brown discussed "Horses in the Eddas and Sagas," which was a treat for those of us who have read Nancy's books but hadn't had the opportunity to hear her talk in person. After a very nice lunch, we were treated to a second talk by Svanhildur Hall, who discussed "Setting Clear Breeding Goals and How to Achieve Them." Svanny is a wonderful and entertaining speaker and gave a good overview of several topics unfamiliar to many members, such as BLUP and the Breed Evaluation scoring system. We thank Merrimack Valley Icelandics for bringing Svanny over, as well as the USIHC and NEIHC for helping support our speakers. Sherry Hoover and Leslie had a Trivia game planned to end the meeting, but concerns about the driving conditions caused this to be cancelled, so maybe next time."

March 2 brought one of our favorite

events of the year, the NEIHC's 14th Annual Meeting and Thorrablot party. Heleen Heyning hosted the event, which 17 members attended, in addition to the Board. NEIHC President Em Potts ran the annual meeting, and Board members Brigit Huwyler, Leslie Chambers, and Leah Greenberger were in attendance; Jess Haynsworth and Nikkisue Flanigan participated via FaceTime. The meeting included presentations on youth activities, promotion and education, fundraising, and a membership and treasurer's report, as well as discussions about upcoming events for the year and an open floor discussion during which members could ask questions and provide feedback. Once the meeting concluded, the potluck dinner and party began! Thank you to all who attended and made this event so much fun, as always. One of the topics discussed was moving our Thorrablot party and Annual Meeting to later in the year, when the weather would be better to make traveling easier in our snowy climate, so stay tuned to find out when we will host this event in 2020.

2019 is shaping up to be an excellent year for our club, as our calendar is already jam-packed with exciting events.

June 8-9 there will be a Schooling

Show at Solheimar Farm in Vermont, judged by Jana Meyer.

Our club's biggest and most exciting event of the year, the NEIHC Open, will take place on June 21-23. On Friday, June 21, there will be a dressage schooling show, judged by Jana Meyer and Alex Pregitzer, while June 22-23 will be the USIHC-sanctioned sport competition on the main oval track. This year we will have three judges and many exciting additions, including equitation classes for non-professional riders and Gæðingakeppni classes (one of the three judges will be a certified Gæðingakeppni judge). The pre-show clinic will take place June 19-21, and will be taught by Terral Hill and Carrie Lyons-Brandt of Taktur Icelandics.

July 20-21, Solheimar Farm in Vermont will host a USIHC-sanctioned sport competition, to be judged by Þorgeir Guðlaugsson.

September 1-2, there will be a FEIF Breeding Evaluation and Young Horse Assessment at the Cobleskill Fairgrounds in New York. All riders are welcome to participate for unofficial scores, comments, and coaching.

September 3-5, a Knapamerki clinic and testing will be offered at West Wind Farm in Delhi, NY. The clinic is currently full, but members can contact Martina Gates to be put on a waiting list.

September 12-15, there will be a Sport Judging Seminar and testing at Echo Ledge Farm in Woodstock, VT. Contact Leslie Chambers if you would like to participate.

Equine Affaire in Springfield, MA, takes place November 7-10. Contact Emily Potts if you are interested in volunteering to help our club represent the Icelandic horse at this event.

We hope to see you all at some of these exciting upcoming events.

SIRIUS

By Sherry Hoover and Kerstin Lundgren

Six members of the Sirius Ohio and Kentucky Club attended the three-day breeding seminar and young horse linear description on March 8-10 at Léttleiki Icelandics in Shelbyville, KY. On Friday, Elsa Albertsdóttir, who is an international breeding judge, BLUP researcher, and professor of breeding and genetics, shared



Sirius Club members at the Léttleiki breeding seminar assess Jane Thomas's mare Ljufa from Destiny Farm. Photo by Sherry Hoover.

with us the history of the young horse linear description. In Iceland, where Elsa resides, a young horse evaluation is a social event. Foals up to two years old are "described" by traits of conformation, character, gaits, and type of movements. (Many three-year-olds in Iceland, by contrast, are assessed for a conformation score at an official breeding evaluation.) The young horses are rated on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being "little" and 5, "much." These terms relate to what the judge sees at that moment in time.

Elsa stressed the importance of conformation as it relates to the horse's gaits. Conformation should enhance the horse's health, function, and longevity, and contribute to a more natural ride. The ultimate goal of breeding is a beautiful horse with functional abilities. In addition to the young horse's inherited abilities, the environment that the foal grows up in influences whether or not the foal develops early or late. At two years of age the foal will have reached the leg length that it will have as an adult. Therefore, during these early

years how we feed the young horse impacts its development as an adult horse.

Day Two of the seminar was the live young horse linear description. Elsa talked about what she saw in each horse and described the traits each horse presented.

We had the unique experience of seeing the stallions at Léttleiki, Sporður frá Bergi and Svali frá Tjörn, with their offspring. Sporður's two offspring, though full siblings, had completely different coat colors. With Elsa's guidance we could, however, see the heritability of conformation traits in these young horses.

Two mares and a yearling colt sired by Svali came all the way from Texas to participate. What an interesting learning experience it was for us to see both the mare and the stallion with their offspring! The colt from Texas presented many of Svali's conformation traits, combined with those of his mother, who was also impressive. We were wowed by his movements—proof that conformation influences the quality of the gaits.



Left, international breeding judge Elsa Albertsdóttir assesses the yearling colt Reykur from WMF Texoma, bred by Jean and Ken Podborny. Photo by Sherry Hoover. Right, Charlotte Cook instructs Lori Cretney at Winterhorse Park. Photo by Shaila Sigsgaard.



Two yearling colts sired by Pröstur frá Hvammi, currently the highest evaluated stallion in the U.S., were also presented as a family group.

Finally, Elsa helped us describe two foals that were half siblings, a three-year-old filly and a yearling colt, using the mare's first prize assessment scores and descriptions. All attendees agreed that having the parents and family groups of foals to view was a very worthwhile educational experience.

The last day of the seminar was filled with information about breeding evaluations for adult horses. Elsa said she assesses about 1,200 horses a year, in many different countries. Last year at Landsmót, the Icelandic National Horse Show, she assessed 200 of the very best horses in Iceland.

Using the breed standard of the Icelandic horse, Elsa walked us through the evaluation process, starting with the measurements of the horse and the conformation assessment. She demonstrated how to set up the horse correctly for the conformation assessment, that is, how to move and place the horse's legs to best present the horse. We learned that the proportional relationship of the head, neck, and shoulders with the back and croup are the most important relationship—and not only in the conformation assessment. These proportions directly relate to the ridden abilities of the horse.

We were tested on whether we saw a high-set or low-set neck and on determining the angle of the shoulders. When we stumbled on “deep neck” versus “thick neck,” Elsa explained that “deep” refers to what we see when we look at the front of the horse, and “thick” to what we see when we view the neck from the side.

With the use of Landsmót videos, we saw the ridden abilities portion of the breed evaluation. Elsa explained that the judges have 150 meters of viewing area to see the gait presentations. The judges are always looking for the best representation of the Icelandic standards. For the category “form under rider,” the judges consider all the gaits, asking, for example, Is the tail loose and flowing? Is the poll naturally curved, or tense and upright? The category “spirit” likewise describes the horse's complete show. Did the horse demonstrate speed

changes in a cooperative manner?

Elsa closed her presentation with the advice to always ask the judges if you don't understand something. The breed evaluation is all about the horse, and the judges look at the horse like horse people. Thank you to Maggie Brandt of Léttleiki Icelandics for inviting Elsa to share her extensive knowledge with everyone—and also for hosting the delicious Saturday night dinner.

A few days later, on March 15-17, several Sirius Club members attended a clinic, either as auditors or as riding participants, with the world champion pace rider, trainer and veterinarian Charlotte Cook, at Taktur Icelandics in Prospect, KY. Charlotte was invited from Denmark to hold this clinic. In 2017, she became world champion in 100m speed pace (she still holds that title); she also took bronze in the 250m pace race. Charlotte is famous for her unique pace riding style and now gets invited to hold clinics in Iceland for top Icelandic riders and trainers. She told us that people used to laugh at her, but she has clearly proven her style works. The clinic consisted of both theoretical lectures (with interesting discussions), and one-on-one lessons, both in the arena and on the track. It was an overall fun and interesting clinic. Thank you to Shaila Sigsgaard for putting the clinic together, and of course thank you to Carrie Lyons-Brandt and Terral Hill for the use of their wonderful facility. Last but not least, a big thank you to Jim and Maryann Welch for the use of their track, the social pizza-dinner, and the tour of their fantastic historic home.

The Sirius Club is now considering hosting a clinic, and as this issue of the *Quarterly* goes to print we are finalizing our plans. Look for an update on the USIHC events calendar at www.icelandics.org.

TOPPUR

By Liz Appel

In March, the Toppur Club, based in Truro, IA, hosted a two-day Knapamerki (Icelandic Riding Levels 1 and 2) learning clinic to its members and anyone else who was interested. Coming out of a horrendous Iowa winter, there were many eager participants. Attendees ranged in age from seven to 80-plus.

Virginia Lauridsen of Harmony



Mummi Skúlason instructs Kruzann Osborne during the Toppur Clinic at Harmony Icelandics. Photo by Justin Osborne.

Icelandics invited Mummi Skúlason of Hallkelsstaðahlíð to come from Iceland to teach the clinic. On Day One, the Level 1 lecture was followed by group seat lessons. On Day Two, the Level 2 lecture was followed by private lessons. A wonderful lunch was served each day, during which we shared experiences, stories, and camaraderie.

Participants were given specific exercises tailored to their personal goals and learning levels. There was overwhelmingly positive feedback, and we even welcomed some newer Icelandic horse enthusiasts who became club members. Each and every participant came away with new and exciting knowledge, skills, and friendships.

Thank you Mummi, for your instruction and calm encouragement for both horse and rider.

We look forward to warmer temperatures, shedding horses, and many club trail rides and campouts as summer arrives.

SUN PROTECTION FOR HORSES AND RIDERS

BY ZOE JOHNSON

As riders, we spend a lot of time outside, from mucking runs, to fixing fences, to trail riding. While it is mostly enjoyable, all this time in the sun can lead to some serious consequences, both for us and our horses.

Sunburns are one of the most obvious. We've all been there: You forget sunscreen one day at the barn and before you know it you've turned into a lobster. Some people pull out the excuse, "I never burn, I just tan." Well, the hard, cold truth is that a tan is just as bad. When skin is damaged

by ultraviolet (UV) rays, it increases the production of melanin, which causes the skin to change color, either to red or to a darker brown, resulting in either a tan, a sunburn, or freckles. All three are signals that your skin was damaged by UV radiation, so don't take them lightly. And don't forget: The sun is still harmful in the winter and when it's cloudy. Clouds only block about 20% of the sun's UV rays, and snow reflects 80% of UV rays, increasing sun exposure on winter days.

Sunburns, tans, and freckles, how-

ever, are just the beginning. Repeated damage to the skin leads to skin cancer, such as basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and melanoma. While the non-melanoma cancers are rarely fatal, treatment can be expensive, as well as painful, and leave scars. Melanomas, however, are extremely dangerous: One person dies of melanoma every hour. Although it is the least common type of skin cancer, the number of melanoma cases being diagnosed annually has increased in the last decade by 53%. In the United States, more people are diagnosed with skin cancer each year than all other types of cancers combined.

Sun damage also expedites the aging of your skin. UV radiation from the sun causes the skin to lose elasticity, creating wrinkles, and the localized overproduction of melanin produces dark blemishes, or liver spots. Repeated sun damage leads to coarse, leathery skin.

Horses can get sunburned also, although mostly on their muzzles or around their eyes, especially if they are light colored or have white markings. For horses, the biggest concern regarding sun exposure is photosensitization, a condition causing an increased skin sensitivity to UV rays. Photosensitivity can be caused by ingestion of plants, such as St. John's Wort and Buckwheat, or sometimes by liver problems. So if your horses are adequately protected from the sun and they still get burned, consider consulting your veterinarian.

RIDER SUN PROTECTION

How can we protect ourselves from sun damage while still pursuing our passion for horses? Sunscreen is always a good start, but not all sunscreen is created equal. SPF stands for Sun Protection Factor; it measures how well a sunscreen protects against UVB rays. A common misconception is that SPF 60 is twice as effective as SPF 30, for example. In reality, the difference in effectiveness between smaller SPFs is much greater than that between larger ones.



Zoe Johnson and Prins protecting themselves from the sun. While Prins's hat isn't practical, a flymask or sunscreen can help. Photo by Darlene Johnson.

Between SPF 0 and SPF 10 is an increase of 90%, while between SPF 30 and SPF 40 there is only a very slight change. All sunscreens with an SPF of over 30 are very similar; however there are other factors to consider alongside SPF. One of these is that SPF only measures effectiveness against UVB rays, not UVA rays, which are also harmful and can cause melanomas, so make sure to choose a broad-spectrum or full-spectrum sunscreen to protect you from both types of UV light.

Wearing wide-brimmed hats is another crucial element of sun protection that is not widely recognized. Sunscreen only goes so far to protect us from the sun, and it is easy to forget to reapply it, so wearing a hat is a great idea. Baseball caps don't cover enough skin to be very useful, and they leave your ears and neck entirely exposed, so harness your inner cowboy and put on a nice wide-brimmed hat. Your skin will thank you!

When you ride, of course, you will want to wear a helmet, but that doesn't mean a wide brim is out of the question. A variety of companies sell detachable helmet visors that protect your face on those long trail rides. They come in multiple styles and colors.

For the rest of your body, wearing long sleeves and pants whenever possible is one of the most effective ways to protect yourself from sun damage over long periods of time. Let's face it, most of us don't look our best when we're at the barn anyway, so why not at least protect your skin? With a quick online search you can

find a ton of sun shirts that provide UV protection without making you too hot. In fact, thin and loose long-sleeved clothing can make you feel cooler than a tank top, in the same way that you feel cooler in the shade than in direct sunlight.

HORSE SUN PROTECTION

We can protect our horses from the sun's rays in the same ways that we protect ourselves. Although many horses don't need extra help with sun protection, horses with white facial markings that spend a lot of time in the sun can get burned just like us.

Horse sunburns can be prevented just like human sunburns—with masks, fly sheets, and sunscreen. Any human sunscreen with a high SPF works well on horses, but types with zinc tend to hold up the best. Apply a thick coat and don't bother rubbing it in; that will only irritate both of you and make the sunscreen less effective. To treat a mild sunburn, apply a soothing ointment, such as aloe, followed by a thick layer of sunscreen to prevent further damage.

If your horse gets severely sunburned or is getting burned even with adequate preventative measures, contact your veterinarian. This could be an indication of photosensitivity or an allergic reaction that should be addressed.

Skin damage caused by sun exposure is a real risk for both us and our horses, but it is easily preventable. By putting in just a little effort, we can dramatically reduce the danger of potentially deadly skin cancer and protect our skin's health for years to come.



RESOURCES

“Confused about Sunscreen? Get the Facts.” Mayo Clinic, Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/best-sunscreen/art-20045110

“Horses Get Sunburned Too.” Minnesota Horse Council, www.mnhorsecouncil.org/horses%20get%20sunburned%20too.php

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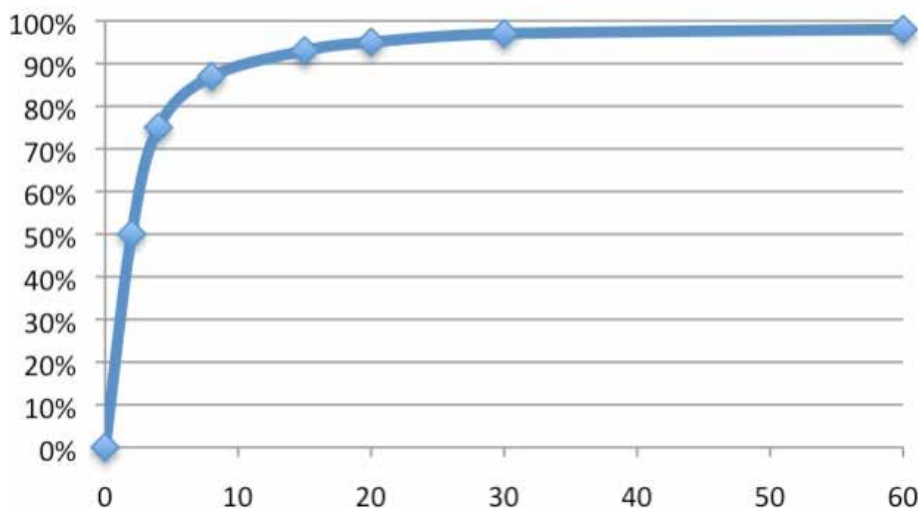
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“Sun Protection for Horses | Prevent Horse Sunburn | Horseman's Report.” Horse Supplies, Products, Health & Care Tips, www.horsehealthproducts.com/horsemans-report/equine-health/under-the-sun-protecting-your-horse-from-sun-damage-and-sunburn

“The Known Health Effects of UV.” World Health Organization, www.who.int/uv/faq/uvhealthfac/en/index2.html

“What Causes a Sunburn and Suntan?” American Academy of Dermatology, www.aad.org/public/kids/skin/skin-cancer/what-causes-a-sunburn

UVB protection vs. SPF



THE IMAGE AT THE CENTER

BY ALYS CULHANE

Five years ago I went for a ride on my Icelandic mare Rauðhetta, or Raudi. It was a beautiful fall day. I opted to do a four-mile ride from my house to Grizzly Camp, in Alaska's Matanuska Moose Range. The fireweed is in full bloom here from late July to mid-August. The sight on a good fireweed year is breathtaking. For miles in every direction, the gentle uphill slope is cloaked in a vivid purple blanket.

I rode to Grizzly camp, ate lunch, then mounted up and reluctantly turned in the direction of home. Several small creeks cross the route to and from Grizzly Camp. Raudi was on edge on the return portion of the trip. Every so often she swished her tail, perked her ears forward, and raised her head high. This, I decided, was just a mare thing.

Halfway home, I heard a rustling in the brush on the far side of Wasilla Creek. Bear, I thought. Bear, Raudi thought. I would have pulled forth my can of bear spray, but I didn't have time. Raudi spun around like a red blood cell in a centrifuge and unseated me. I landed hard, on my left side. The creek bed was rocky and about six inches deep. I raised my head and looked to my left. The rustling sound was my husband Pete on his Icelandic, Tinni, pushing willow branches aside. He'd come out to join me. I looked to my right. Raudi was by now grazing on creekside grass.

Pete dismounted and released Tinni. He chose to graze beside Raudi.

"You okay?" he asked.

"Uhh-uhh," I said, adding, "I can't breathe."

"Well, if you're talking, you can breathe," Pete said.

He held out a hand and helped me rise to a standing position. I doubled over, because it felt like someone was jabbing a knife into my side. "Cracked ribs," I gasped.

"Yep, cracked ribs," Pete said.

RECOVERING

We headed for home, Pete leading Rambunctious Raudi and me leading Steady Eddy Tinni. I walked doubled over like an L, stopping every so often to gasp for air. We arrived back at the homestead, and Pete untacked and put the horses away. I did two things I never do: I took two Ibuprofen and



Alys and Raudi with friends in the fireweed near Grizzly Camp. Photo by Pete Praetorius.

at mid-day crawled into bed. And there I remained, for the next three days.

I seethed some. It was *déjà vu* all over again. Raudi was not and never would be a reliable trail horse, therefore I should sell her. But who'd buy her? No one in their right mind would want a horse as willful as this one. Pete, as he'd done repeatedly in the past, told me to wait a few days before putting a for-sale announcement on Craig's List.

A friend, visiting me, asked me why I hadn't been wearing my safety vest. I told her that I forgot to put it on. The truth be known, I'd purchased it for jumping lessons, which started at the beginning of the summer. This was a good investment, because Raudi sometimes took jumps and sometimes she did not. And when she did not, I came off. I'd worn the vest while out on trail rides, but over time less and less often because it was a tight fit. I also could not get my fishing vest (which has pockets) over my riding vest. And my level of confidence was such that on most days I didn't give putting it on much thought.

The wheels in my head began turning after my friend left. I would not be lying in bed if I'd been wearing my vest. Rather, I'd be out riding. Of course, if I was a better rider, I wouldn't have come out of the sad-

dle. This was an instance in which history repeated itself. Upon hearing the bushes rustle, I'd lifted my knees, bent forward into a crouch, looked at Raudi's mane, and yelped. This is what I always did when dealing with the unexpected.

Lying in bed, I continued to free-associate. I had, a few months before, attended my first Centered Riding Clinic in Galt, CA. The clinician, Level 4 Centered Riding Instructor Susan Harris, explained that Centered Riding was based on four principles: breathing, centering, soft eyes, and building blocks, or alignment. Maybe, just maybe, my reviewing what I'd learned would be useful when I again mounted up.

REFLECTING

I got out of bed, hobbled over to my bookcase, and pulled out my copy of Sally Swift's *Centered Riding I*. I returned to bed and flipped through the pages, focusing on the basics.

Centering: "If (when riding) you imagine that you are a doll weighted at the bottom you will remain stable" (page 18).

Soft Eyes: "Relax your eyes. Let the object be the general center of your gaze but look at it with peripheral vision taking on the largest possible expanse, above and below, to the left as well as to the right" (10).

Breathing: "Breathing only in your

chest is like blowing up a balloon. It is hard work. Breathing with a bellows in your lower body is easier and more efficient” (14).

Building Blocks: “If you balance the various parts of the body correctly, one above the other, you will reduce the amount of muscle tension or strain used to keep the body upright, and in doing so, save energy for other uses. ... The bottom building block is your legs and feet. The next block is your pelvis, then rib cage, shoulders, and last, your head and neck” (19).

Picture, imagine, envision, think of—these words came to mind when I set down my book and closed my eyes. It was then that I had what ultimately was a life-changing epiphany. It was like in Thomas Kinsella’s *Field of Dreams* when Shoeless Joe says, “Build it and they will come.” The analogy was that I too could envision change.

Sally Swift, the founder of Centered Riding, had a vision, and central to her vision was the use of imagery. This concept resonated with me in part because of a related, lifelong interest. It began early on in my horse life, with an obsession with a horse named Dancer’s Image. The gelding was a son of Native Dancer and Noor’s Image. And so I imagined him winning the 1968 Derby, which he did.

The word image also became an integral part of my writing life. My teachers instilled in me a lifelong, abiding love of the image as it manifested itself in the arts, both visual and written. And so it was no wonder that after this accident I became interested in learning as much as I could about the who, what, where, when, and why of imagery, particularly as it related to Centered Riding.

IMAGINING

I began my foray into imagistic learning by doing a close reading of *Centered Riding I*. When I was again able to ride, I experimented with some of Swift’s images, keeping in mind what she had often said to her instructors and students: We are 75 percent, and the horses are 25 percent, of the equitation equation.

Some of Swift’s images are internally driven, while others are more external. The first image that I worked with fit into the latter category. Swift, in thinking of ways we as riders might ground ourselves, suggests that we picture ourselves like trees. She writes, “Imagine that you are a growing spruce tree. A tree cannot make itself grow: It can only allow itself to grow.

So allow your torso, the trunk of your tree, to grow up while your legs, the roots of the tree, grow down. It’s okay to repeat this directive as often as you want, then let it go, as trying to maintain this growing feeling will cause you to become rigid.” (40).

The image of growth in relation to a spruce tree resonated with me because I live and ride in a heavily forested area. I remember the first time I tried this, in combination with the other Centered Riding basics. I came to a descent that Pete and I named Suicide Hill because you have to turn the horse just so on the forehand before heading downhill. It’s also icy in the winter. Raudi had always been rushy going down this short, steep, straight incline. Plus it’s close to home. On the day in question, I glanced at a nearby spruce, aligned my back, shoulders, and head with it, thought about growing, looked with soft eyes out in the direction of the distant Chugach Range, and breathed. Raudi walked downhill slowly, earning high praise at the base. Pete followed on Tinni, who has always taken hills slowly. I, beaming, said, “She got it!”

“I think you both got it,” Pete replied. He was right. Raudi was in balance going downhill because I was in balance.

I then began bringing other images to mind, both while on the ground and while riding. For instance, I began picturing headlights on my shoulders and hips, and practiced pointing them in the direction I wanted to go. Raudi soon ceased her lifelong habit of falling in at the shoulder when doing serpentines and turns. I also began picturing my hands holding baby birds, and my arms from the elbows down, feeling heavy, like firehoses. In response to the latter, Raudi rounded her back and lowered her head.

LEARNING

I became obsessed with learning as much as I could about the subject of imagery. I retraced Sally Swift’s footsteps and read everything that I could on the subject, so as to learn as much as I could about the who, what, where, and why of imaging. It was not hard to backtrack, because Swift was quick to give credit to and cite those who shaped her thinking.

Those who informed Swift’s thinking were well versed in the area of ideokinesis, this term being Greek for thought (mind) and movement (body). When she was eight, Swift was diagnosed as having a lateral curvature of the spine, or scoliosis. From then until she was in her twenties, she was a student of Mabel Ellsworth Todd (1880-1956), whose premise is that



Her helmet and vest may keep Alys safe in a fall, but her imagination can keep that fall from happening. Photo by Pete Praetorius.



Illustration by Chris Romano

with our minds we can control deep inner muscles that we would not be able to activate by moving just an arm or a leg. Swift notes in the introduction of *Centered Riding I* that Todd “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 on the ground” (2).

I attempted to read Todd’s book *The Thinking Body*. Her anatomically based concepts were difficult to grasp, so I set it aside. I returned to it after taking three anatomy and physiology courses at our local college. The second time around, her images leapt out at me in the same way as those in *Centered Riding I* and *II*. For instance, she suggests when walking to picture an alligator tail “dragging from the end of your spine, and your legs trying to run away from it.” Or, she writes, imagine as you walk that you are kicking the autumn leaves in a field or wading through the current of a stream (211). She next provided her readers with an anatomical rationale for this walking-based exercise. As I understand

it, torsion lengthens and compression strengthens the spine.

Another one of Sally Swift’s immediate influences was F.M. Alexander (1869-1955). Alexander was an Australian actor who began experiencing chronic laryngitis whenever he performed. His doctors couldn’t help him, so he came up with his own solution. He determined that excess neck and body tension were the source of his problems, and subsequently sought alternative ways of speaking and moving with greater ease.

His doctors and friends persuaded him to teach others what he had learned. Alexander’s focus was on re-educating the mind and body toward greater reintegration, with special reference to posture and movement. Swift affirms Alexander’s dictate that, rather than work at bringing about change, we should instead envision it. Not surprisingly, his directives, like Swift’s, are laden with imagery. Quoting Alexander, she writes, “‘Let the neck be free to let the head go forward and up and to let the back be long and wide.’ Notice in each case that you must ‘let’ and not ‘make’ anything happen. To let the neck be free you don’t wiggle it around—that’s doing something. Rather you must allow it to feel soft and empty. To let the head go properly forward and up, you should look straight ahead with your soft eyes and then imagine the tug of some hair pulled up from the top of your head” (48).

Denise McCluggage (1927-2015) also shaped Swift’s imagistic thinking. McCluggage was an American auto racing driver, cross-country ski instructor, journalist, author, and photographer. She developed a method of teaching skiing that, says Swift, “echoes my work almost completely.” Her one book, *Centered Skier: Skiing as a Moving Meditation*, is as applicable to skiing as it is to riding. McCluggage’s anecdotal information, casual writing style, and 1970s references make for an engaging read. At the same time, McCluggage advances Todd’s and Alexander’s ideas about imagery by writing in Chapter Seven (entitled “Working in Images”) about the importance of mental practice, visualization, pathways, reframing, and the implementation of scenarios. For example, she asks us to picture a skier on a lift, visualizing her run. While in the chair, McCluggage says, “she sees herself leaving her weight shift too late into the turn and ski tips crossing. She feels her stiffened expectation and watches the fall. Stop. Re-

verse. Abruptly she whisks herself backward out of the instantly healing sitzmark, back around to the point where the offending sequence began. Stop. Mark it (127).

RECREATING

After reading this passage, I made a mental comparison. I rode to that creek crossing on the way home from Grizzly Camp, sat there for a bit, and abandoned my image of my being a hapless blood cell in a centrifuge. Instead, I pictured Raudi and me going fearlessly across the creek, her head low and mine upright. I further pictured a silver mylar balloon on the crown of my head—it was bobbing in the gentle fall breeze. And, yes, reassessing, releasing and recreating (my words, not Sally Swift’s) worked.

Since I began to study Centered Riding, I’m a more confident and competent rider. Raudi has thrown in a spin once in a very great while, but I have remained in the saddle, I think, because over time I’ve become more balanced. Never say never. I remain a strong advocate of helmet and vest use. I wear a helmet on every outing and a vest on most occasions.

The above was really just an account of the start of what continues to be a most amazing journey. My interest in imagery began by following the direct path of Sally Swift’s thinking. I have continued my studies by casting a wide net and doing further reading on the mind/body relationship. In addition, I’ve been putting theory to practice by exploring the various body awareness modalities, as these relate to my own and to my horses’ kinesthetic development.



To center yourself, imagine you’re a spruce tree, with your roots deep in the ground and your head in the air. Photo by Pete Praetorius.

GAIT TRAINING MADE SIMPLE

BY JESS HAYNSWORTH

Spend any time on an online Icelandic horse forum, and you will see countless questions from people wondering how to train or ride their horse's gaits. "How do I teach my horse to tölt?" "How do I ride the tölt?" "My horse's tölt is pacey, how do I fix it?" Responses range from sweet (but misguided), to downright snarky; "get a trainer" is the most common.

A kind of mystique has come to surround gait training, as if it were some sort of complicated magic that cannot be explained to mere muggles. This, in my opinion, does not serve our community or our horses. Overcomplicating gait separation makes it harder for people to understand the biomechanics of the gaits and what might be required of their horses, and of themselves as riders, to perform each gait correctly. It restricts the owners' ability to troubleshoot—to understand why their horses might be struggling to perform a certain gait correctly and comfortably. It creates a culture of confusion that causes unnecessary stress and pressure for the horse. Worst of all, it keeps Icelandic horse owners from having the information they need to choose the best trainer and training program for their horses.

I think gait separation training is very simple—simple, but not easy. At heart, we are teaching the horse to consciously move and balance his body in a different, specific way when we deliver a specific cue. The methods we use as trainers may differ, but the biomechanics, learning theory, and science of movement behind training the horse to perform these gaits does not change. These are concepts that even novice riders are capable of understanding and thinking critically about.

Training a horse takes skill, understanding, education, practice, and time, and these are things that the average horse owner does not have. "Get a trainer" is therefore very solid advice, but owners should still be able to understand the training process, the theory and science



When training the gaits, Jess Haynsworth uses terrain to her advantage. Here, she has four-year-old Bogi frá Efri-Rauðalæk follow the target down a hill to encourage him to choose tölt. Photo by Emily Potts.

behind what they are asking the horse to do, and the methods that the trainer intends to use on their horse.

Note: This is not a how-to article. It's intended, instead, to demystify a topic that I feel is often over-complicated.

I began riding Icelandic horses when I was 12 years old. Like most people, I was originally taught to ride tölt by "combining the driving and restricting aids," which for many people means driving the horse forward into the contact. For five-gaited horses or horses which preferred tölt, this was easy enough; but for trotty four-gaited horses, I found that I needed a lot of pressure with my legs to keep the horse in tölt.

Later, when I began training young horses in Iceland, I found that training tölt this way was very challenging, especially for trotty youngsters. Often there was confusion and resistance from the

horse initially. Tölt training became my least favorite part of training young horses, because I spent so much time getting them soft on the contact and relaxed in the basic gaits, and then I felt like I had to undo all of that when the time came to start them tölting.

As I began to pursue a career training horses here in the U.S., I found my way to French classical dressage and the principal of "leg without hand, hand without leg." The idea is that when the leg and hand are applied at the same time, the horse is forced to ignore one or the other, because these aids send conflicting messages. The horse has to do a lot of guesswork to figure out what the rider wants, in order to relieve the conflicting pressure. Because horses habituate easily to pressure, the rider has to use more pressure over time as the horse gets used to the discomfort—which explains why



By raising the target, Jess encourages Bogi to shift his weight appropriately and to raise the base of his neck so that he will choose tölt, which she then can mark and place on a vocal cue. Photo by Emily Potts.

those four-gaited horses from my past required so much leg to maintain the tölt. French classical dressage makes each cue very clear and separate, and riders only apply one aid at a time. I found that riding this way immediately made my horses much lighter to seat, leg, and rein aids, and changed the way I rode tölt.

Meanwhile, I had also changed the way I trained gait separation, because I began using clicker training and in-hand work from the French classical tradition. Both of these tools allowed me to train gait separation early on from the ground up, without using pressure or combining driving and restricting aids in a way that was confusing or stressful to the horse. Today, gait separation is one of my favorite parts of training young horses, and I find that I love to retrain older horses who were trained to tölt incorrectly and are “difficult” to ride in tölt.

THE NATURE OF THE HORSE

I like to train horses using positive reinforcement and correct biomechanics to help the horse find his “joy in movement.” I know many trainers share this goal, regardless of method. In order to capture this joy, we need to understand the circumstances under which the horse might willingly choose to move in each gait.

Icelandic horses are naturally gaited. This means that they are born with the ability to perform lateral gaits like tölt and pace, in addition to diagonal gaits like trot. In recent years, scientists have discovered a “pace gene” which allows the horses to perform the lateral gaits. Because the gene is recessive, it could accidentally be bred out of Icelandic horses, so if a young horse is showing zero inclination to travel in a lateral gait, it may be worth having him tested for the gene. But for the most part, Icelandic

horses do have the genetic ability to travel in lateral gaits.

Tölt is a four-beated lateral gait with no suspension. This means that at least one foot is on the ground at all times. Many people like to ride the tölt because this lack of suspension means that the gait is very smooth to ride—no air time means no bounce.

Pace is a lateral gait with suspension. True racing pace also has no collection—the horse is stretched out like an arrow, traveling as fast as it can. Compare tölt vs. racing pace to canter (three beats) vs. racing gallop (which becomes four-beated at its fastest, because the horse is stretched out as flat as can be).

In between true racing pace and tölt lies a whole spectrum of not-quite-perfectly-evenly-separated-four-beated gaits that we refer to as “pacey tölt.” The horse is traveling in a lateral gait, but he may not be so smooth to ride because his gait is tending more in the direction of pace.

Trot is a diagonal gait: The legs move in diagonal pairs. Trot does have suspension and can have collection. When a horse’s tölt tends more toward the direction of trot and is not-quite-perfectly-four-beated, we call it “trotty tölt.”

We have to ask ourselves, why do horses have these gaits? Are they just for humans to enjoy? Or are there times when the horses might choose to use lateral gaits for their own benefit?

Based on footprints uncovered by archaeologists, there is evidence that prehistoric horses traveled in lateral gaits, and we find lateral gaits in other primitive breeds such as Tibetan and Mongolian horses, not just in Icelandics. This suggests that gaitedness may be a trait that predates human influence and was once common in equines.

The best way to learn what motivates a horse to choose a specific gait is to watch a herd of horses in Iceland. Watch them running, playing, and traveling over the terrain the breed adapted to live on. You’ll quickly observe that the horses do make use of all their gaits—in specific scenarios.

For traveling through deep snow, mud, or up steep hills, you’ll see a lot of trot and canter: gaits that have suspension and push the horse up and over obstacles like deep footing or inclines.

For running over icy terrain, down

steep hills, or for navigating very tricky, uneven terrain, you'll see them choose variations of a lateral gait, which allows them to keep at least one foot on the ground at all times, thereby minimizing their chances of falling.

Lateral gaits are also very stabilizing for the spine and are less jarring than gaits that have clearer suspension, so horses may use them when they are injured or sore. Gallop and racing pace might be used in play or when escaping danger, gallop over normal terrain and pace over slippery terrain where the horse needs to keep his footing and can't safely gallop.

As a prey animal, the horse's key to safety is balance. It doesn't matter how fast a horse can run if he's going to fall in front of a predator. For equines that adapted to live in places with icy, challenging terrain, having access to a lateral gait makes perfect sense for being able to outrun danger while still keeping one foot on the ground at all times.

Therefore, tölt and pace are not just gaits for humans to enjoy. Each gait is useful to the horse—and that means we can harness the horse's desire to perform each gait, in order to train him with understanding.

It is worth noting that here in the U.S., we mostly keep horses in flat paddocks and gently rolling pastures where they might not need to use their lateral gaits on their own quite so much. We see them do it as foals, when they are unsteady, but as they get older and more balanced, they tend to prefer trot and canter, which let them move more efficiently over easy terrain. By the time we want to train them, they might be quite out of practice when it comes to using their full gait spectrum.

THE HORSE'S UNDERSTANDING

Humans have decided that tölt and pace are separate gaits, and that only a perfectly clear, evenly separated four-beated tölt is a true tölt. However, if you were to ask an Icelandic colt what gait he is doing as he runs freely in his herd, he would not be able to answer you. The horse does not consciously decide, "Now I will trot, now I will canter, now I will pace, now I will tölt." The horse is simply enjoying his range of motion, and running in the way that feels best on whatever terrain he is traversing. He uses his body in the



Using poles, deeper footing like tall grass (or snow), or uphill slopes will encourage a horse to use trot, as will working with his neck extended. Photo by Emily Potts.

way that keeps him upright and moving efficiently at any given moment. As the terrain slopes upwards, he will trot or canter. As it slopes downward or gets slippery, he will tölt or pacey-tölt, keeping a foot on the ground so that he can continue to run without losing his balance. His conformation and natural balance also play a role in which gait feels best to him in a given moment.

When we bring a young horse into the stable, he does not know that tölt and pace are separate gaits. He is not really conscious that any of the gaits are separate. We have to teach him that they are—and that we want him to separate these gaits for us. In the beginning of gait training, there is no reason to only accept or reward clear tölt. At first, the horse is likely to offer us something pacey or trotty, and this is absolutely normal and okay.

Many people make the mistake of waiting to train the lateral gaits until they have finished training the basic gaits (walk, trot, and canter). However, very early in the training, when the horse is perhaps a bit uncertain and trying to balance with the new equipment on his back, or making circles in the round pen for the first time, etc., he may try running in a pacey lateral gait or mixing gaits, switching rapidly between lateral and

diagonal gaits. This is the ideal moment to clarify things for the horse, by putting the lateral and diagonal gaits on separate vocal cues. This is the moment to capture that pacey, tense gait, reward it, and put it on a vocal cue even if it isn't the gait we will ultimately want to ride, because in that moment of uncertainty, we can teach the horse that there is a difference between lateral and diagonal gaits.

Once we have trot and whatever kind of pace-tölt we've been offered on two separate vocal cues, we stop cueing the lateral one until we need to use it again—probably after a few months of dressage work in the basic gaits. The horse will still know and remember the vocal cue, because horses have excellent memories. After the horse has developed the strength, balance, and understanding of the seat, leg, and rein aids well enough to perform basic lateral work, bending, and collection, it will be easy to shape this less-than-ideal lateral gait into a balanced, four-beated tölt.

HOW WE DO IT

If there was one thing that I wish all people understood about tölt, it would be this: Horses don't get pacey or trotty on purpose. Tölt, when ridden, is a gait that is extremely dependent on the horse's

and rider's balance both being correct. It's a bit like the difference between any old trot and the gorgeous collected trot you might see in a Grand Prix dressage test. You might wonder, "Why doesn't my horse trot like that?" But if you took that same dressage horse and threw a very unbalanced rider on board, or put the horse in ill-fitting tack, or gave the horse an unbalanced hoof trim, etc. you might see that beautiful collected trot falter. This is why, sometimes, a great trainer or rider can hop on a horse and have it tölt beautifully, but then the horse's owner gets on and the horse is suddenly pacey or falling into trot. It's not disobedience, it's a balance and strength issue.

Many young, green, or out-of-shape horses are simply not strong and balanced enough to be able to perform a clear four-beated tölt of the quality we like to ride, even in the field, let alone with a rider on board. Even if they are naturally well-balanced and can perform a gorgeous clear tölt without a rider, a young horse or incorrectly trained adult horse needs to understand the aids well enough that the rider can give the horse the cues necessary to help the horse balance correctly under the added weight of a rider.

Many people train tölt by driving the horse into the contact, creating pressure with the driving and restricting aids and relieving this pressure only when the horse figures out, through trial and error, how to contort into a gait that feels comfortable to ride. In my experience, horses trained this way tend to revert to a much less-pleasant gait when ridden by less-skilled riders. These horses may be impressive to watch but "difficult to ride correctly." Horses trained in this way may also be prone to arthritis or even to injury. This is because they found their clear gait by compensating and using their bodies incorrectly, as they were motivated by the frantic desire to relieve pressure from the aids rather than by a correct understanding of how to balance their bodies underneath the rider. We tend to see these horses traveling behind the vertical, braced against the bit (although perhaps feeling quite light on the reins to the rider because of the tension held in their necks).

How do we teach horses to tölt with relaxation and understanding and a joy-of-movement that comes from within—as opposed to tölting through a desire to

relieve pressure?

I now begin with clicker training, although for many years I used pressure-release methods. I find that clicker training allows me to progress more quickly with greater relaxation, but everything I describe below can also be trained using other methods.

Once I have established the basic language of clicker training using basic targeting, I progress to using the target to prompt movement. Then I begin to put the movement on various vocal cues. I reward the movement, then add in the cue; once the cue is established, I only reward the movement when it comes after the cue.

I start with walk. Once I have walk on a firm vocal cue, I train transitions such as walk-halt and halt-walk. Then I begin to jog alongside the horse, and I reward the first gait the horse offers me. Depending on the horse, this could be a diagonal gait or it could be a lateral gait. Whichever it is determines which gait I will teach first. If the horse trots, I reinforce it and put "trot" on a vocal cue. If the horse chooses a lateral gait (even an ugly piggy pace) I reinforce it and put that on a vocal cue.

Once I've established that first gait, I teach transitions: walk-gait, halt-gait, gait-walk, gait-halt, etc. Once these are all established on reliable vocal cues, I am ready to teach the horse whichever gait they did not offer me initially.

I do this by playing with the horse's balance, which requires me to have knowledge of the individual horse's conformation and the biomechanics of what I am trying to prompt. Each horse may have something slightly different that prompts them to choose to move within the gait that they did not initially offer. Hoof trim, imbalances in the teeth, and issues in the body that may be helped by chiropractic or bodywork can also be factors. That said, we know enough about why the horses use each gait to make it a relatively simple puzzle. Success is just a matter of finding what works for each horse.

My current young horse, Bogi, is a fun example because he is a well-balanced young horse who seems to choose his lateral gaits as easily as his diagonal gaits. For him, when I want to prompt a lateral gait, I hold the target higher, which causes him to lift his neck and front end to look at the target. The act of lifting his front end shifts

his weight back, the way a horse would shift his weight to go down a steep hill. When his weight is shifted this way, he easily chooses a lateral gait, just as he would going down a hill. If he had a harder time finding a lateral gait, I might actually take him out and jog down some hills with him.

For trot, we know that horses use the suspension gait to propel themselves over challenging footing, but many of us train in flat arenas or round pens. Using poles, deeper footing (like tall grass or snow), or uphill slopes will encourage horses to use a diagonal suspension gait like trot, as will working in neck extension (whereas for tölt the horse must raise the base of the neck and sternum and shift the weight back further in order to comfortably offer the gait). For Bogi, working him over poles allowed me to mark the transition into trot and place it on a vocal cue.

In the beginning, we reward one step at a time. Young and green horses are weak. The object of the game isn't to get as many steps of tölt or trot as we can, it's to get one step, mark it, and build the understanding that this is something different from the gait the horse naturally offers. Trying to build duration too soon can cause the horse to become discouraged, irritable, or stressed.

When the horse undertands the separate vocal cues for trot and a lateral gait, I proceed to start him under saddle. I begin by working him on the longeline, then in-hand. I use French classical dressage to teach him the aids so that each one has a clear meaning and is carefully separated from the other aids. This includes French classical mouthwork, which I introduce using clicker training, to teach the horses specific snaffle cues for relaxing or yielding the jaw, raising the base of his neck and sternum, neck extension, poll flexion, and more. Just as cheetahs use their tails to balance, horses use their heads and necks. By training a relaxed understanding of these snaffle cues, I am able to help the horse position himself for good balance during in-hand work, work on the longe, and work under saddle.

Once I back the young horse, I transition all of the in-hand and vocal cues to under-saddle cues, by which I mean the traditional seat, leg, and rein aids. Here is where I take my lateral gait cue out of the toolbox briefly. Using the snaffle cues the horse learned through the mouthwork, I



Bogi being ridden in walk. Here, Jess is working on neck extension with an open poll and a pleasantly relaxed and mobile mouth, jaw, and topline. Photo by Emily Potts.

give him the cues he needs to balance his body for tölt. Then, I give him the vocal cue for tölt—and he tölts. Happily, comfortably, and with a relaxed understanding of what his body should do. No stress or confusing simultaneous application of “driving” and “restricting” aids at the same time. Just balance, cue, and go. It is that simple—simple, but not easy.

Once the horse is willingly performing a few steps of the lateral gait on cue under saddle, I put it away in my toolbox again. (Again, the quality of the gait is not important, because I do not expect the horse to have good balance underneath me yet, it is only important that the horse understands the difference between lateral and diagonal gaits on cue!) Bogi illustrates what these early steps of under-saddle tölt look like. No, there is no impressive leg action or collection at this stage, but that is okay. He is only four years old, and not developed enough to perform at that level.

Next, we build fitness, strength, and balance, as I teach the more complicated aids and dressage exercises the horse will

need to know so that I can shift his balance beneath me. Once we have achieved that level of understanding, I can dust off the lateral gait cue again and begin to shape the gait into a clearer, more beautiful tölt. Very often, the horse is so strong and balanced by this point that the tölt is already clear. If not, all I need to do is to help the horse balance so that he can move forward in clear beat, with the collection and shoulder freedom we like to see in sport horses.

To retrain a horse that was incorrectly trained to tölt, the process is very similar. I’ve had success retraining trotty older horses that had been squeezed into the gait for years. I’ve also rehabilitated horses that had lost their ability to tölt entirely due to physical injury or emotional stress. In some ways, we can move faster when retraining older horses, because they are already stronger and more developed. The initial work, however, can take a bit longer because they may be less trusting and will take longer to relax. I also find that with older horses, I sometimes have to introduce entirely new cues for them so that

they can truly start fresh.

While the finer methods for each horse may differ, the basics of training gait separation are simple to understand—albeit challenging to apply. I feel it is important for owners and riders to understand how the gaits work, why the horses have them, and how the horses need to balance and move in order to access their gaits comfortably. With this understanding, I hope, owners and riders will be able to think more critically about how they want their horses trained and ridden, and will choose to work with trainers and instructors who utilize methods that are not at odds with the nature of the horse, or the horse’s understanding and wellbeing.

Contact: Jess Haynsworth is a horse trainer and riding instructor who owns and operates Mad River Valley Icelandic Horses, LLC, in Warren, Vermont. Visit www.madrivervalleyicelandics.com or find her on Facebook and Instagram under the same handle.

SPORT 101: FOUR GAIT

BY ALEX PREGITZER

So far in our Sport 101 series we've discussed how to compete in tölt classes, five-gait classes, and loose-rein tölt classes. As we are now in the middle of show season in North America, it's time to look into another extremely popular set of classes: the four gait classes.

Four gait classes are super fun to ride because you are showing a variety of different gaits. Because all gaits weigh equally in the scoring, you can still do well with a horse that has one or two mediocre gaits if it is strong in other gaits. For example, international judges comment regularly on the great quality of walk they see at shows in the U.S. It may be a tribute to the amount of trail riding many of us do. Whatever gaits are your strong suit, show them off!

You can easily find the four gait classes in the show program by looking for the letter V (as in Viergang, the German word for four gait) followed by a number. V1 through V6 are international classes; those

with further letters are classes unique to the U.S. Along with the letter-number combination, a show program usually includes additional information about who is eligible to ride in each class. For example, V1 or V2 open four gait, V3 intermediate four gait, V5 novice four gait, VBR beginner rider four gait, V6 youth four gait, or VGH green horse four gait.

All four gait classes are ridden on an oval track of a standard size and ask you to show walk, trot, canter, and tölt. The difference is in the format (individual class versus group class), the eligibility (who is allowed to ride in each class), and how challenging the class is (cantering one by one versus in a group; showing both slow and fast tölt versus showing any speed tölt).

The prime judging criteria are the same for all classes. That means all classes are judged by the same standards, no matter whether it is an easier class or a more challenging class. Children are judged by the

same standard as professionals.

The key judging elements assessed in every performance are: 1. riding skills and connection, 2. beat and balance, 3. suppleness and relaxation, 4. outline and movements, and 5. correctness and precision of the execution. For detailed descriptions of each element, see the first article in our Sport 101 series (in Issue Two 2018, available in our online archive at www.icelandics.org/quarterly/equarterly.php.)

You do not have to qualify for any classes in the U.S. to enter them initially (other than following the age requirement for youth classes). While professional riders are limited to certain classes, non-professional riders have a variety of classes to choose from, until they score out in some. To find out which classes you are eligible for, see the USIHC-Sanctioned Show Rules and Procedures on the USIHC web site at www.icelandics.org.

COMPARING V1, V2, & V3

V1 is an open class, which means it is open to any riders, including professionals. It is also an individual program, which means that riders compete one at a time. The rider chooses the rein (direction) as well as the order in which he or she performs the four gaits, and the announcer does not instruct the rider when to change gaits. The gaits shown are medium walk, slow tölt, slow to medium trot, slow to medium canter, and fast tölt. All gaits are shown for one full round, except for walk, which is shown for half a round.

V2 is another open class. This class has similar requirements as V1, but is ridden as a group, with a maximum of three riders on the track at a time, and with instructions given by the announcer. The order of gaits is: slow tölt, slow to medium trot, medium walk, slow to medium canter, and fast tölt. All gaits are shown for one full round, except walk. Walk is shown for half a round.

V3 is an intermediate class. It is also ridden as a group, with a maximum of five riders on the track at one time, and with instructions given by the announcer. The only difference between V3 and V2, other than eligibility, is that V3 does not call for fast tölt, but medium to fast tölt instead.



Leslie Chambers and Vaskur from Four Winds Farm showing a beautiful uphill canter. Photo by Martina Gates.

In finals for V1, V2, and V3, the finalists show the gaits together as a group, as instructed by the speaker. The scores for each element of the test are announced in between gaits. The horses walk while the scores are being announced.

COMPARING V4, V5, V6, VBR, AND VGH

All of these classes are group classes, with up to five riders on the track at a time. The riders compete together and receive instructions from the announcer.

V4 is a class that we don't often see in the U.S. It stands out from the other four gait classes in that it focuses strongly on the rider's seat and aids, the harmony between horse and rider, the correctness of the performance, and the obedience of the horse. The different segments of this class are medium walk, any speed tölt, transition walk-tölt and tölt-walk (shown individually, as instructed by the speaker), slow to medium trot, and slow to medium canter (shown individually, as instructed by the speaker). In the U.S., V4 is not a required class for sanctioned shows and is considered a "fun class" if offered.

V5 is a novice class with the following gaits shown: any speed tölt, slow to medium trot, medium walk, and slow to medium canter. Tack in this class is restricted to snaffle bits (no other bits are allowed).

V6 is a youth class. The gait requirements are identical to V5, except for the canter. In V6, the canter is shown one rider at a time, which makes it easier and safer for less experienced or very young riders.

VBR is a beginner class, specifically designed by the USIHC for U.S. shows. The gaits shown are: any speed tölt, any speed trot, medium walk, medium canter (shown individually), and any speed tölt or trot. The last segment of this class is designed to offer a chance for improvement. Each rider chooses to show either tölt or trot one more time. The mark for this section then replaces that rider's previous mark for tölt or trot if there was any improvement. This class is also special in that riders are only judged on the long sides of the track and may use the corners and the short sides to prepare their horses for the gait shown. Tack in this class is restricted to snaffle bits (no other bits are allowed).

VGH is a class for green horses, specifically designed by the USIHC for U.S. shows. The gaits and judging are identical to VBR, only the eligibility requirements are different and there are no restrictions on



Antje Freygang and Galdur frá Reykjavík in good harmony and in a good form at the trot. Photo by Valerie Durbon.

the type of bits allowed. Any level of rider is allowed in this class, from beginner to professional, but the horse must be "green," meaning any horse (of whatever age) that has not achieved a score of 5.0 or higher three times, under any rider, in any class at a USIHC-sanctioned show.

If there are finals for these classes (that is up to the show organizer), the finalists show the gaits together as a group, as instructed by the announcer. The scores for each element of the test are announced between gaits, and the horses walk while the scores are being announced.

WALK

The four gaits you will show in any four gait class are walk, tölt, trot, and canter.

The walk should be a medium speed walk. The judges like to see a focused horse that is moving energetically forward in an even four beat rhythm. The horse should have a long neck and a rounded, relaxed top line and should go forward with suppleness, impulsion, and roomy, determined strides. The back should be elastic. The movement of the walk should go through the whole body, with the horse clearly resting in the steps and not rushing.

The rider should maintain a light, soft, and steady contact with the mouth, allowing

the natural movement of the horse's head and neck. Even if you are not aiming to have your horse "on the bit," you should still have rein contact.

TÖLT

Some classes ask for different speeds of tölt: slow, medium, or fast. If you are not sure how slow you need to go to ride "slow tölt," or how fast to ride "fast tölt," the best approach is to ask an experienced riding instructor or trainer to help you with this. As you ride and receive feedback about your speed, you are able to develop a better feeling for what is correct. Each of the different speeds is supposed to be shown at an even tempo: Speeding up and slowing down is not desired in any four gait class (it is, however, in some tölt classes, but only when specifically called for).

It is very important to understand that not every horse has the ability to perform every one of these speeds of tölt. Some horses naturally possess a wide range of speed differences, while others will only stay balanced in tölt at a certain speed. Like with any other gait, to a certain degree the outcome is a matter of good training and practice, but other factors such as the horse's natural ability, temperament, and conformation play a role.



Guðmar Pétursson and Brána frá Lækjarmóti demonstrating good form and movements at the tölt. Photo by Alex Pregitzer.

Slow tölt is more than just slow. The horse should go in an even four beat rhythm, which runs fluidly through the horse. The neck should be arched and the back active and rounded, the whole topline being without tension. The hindquarters are well engaged and the movements of the forequarters are light and free. The stance phase of the hind legs is longer than the stance phase of the front legs. The horse should move in balance, with a strong and active back, showing suppleness and fluid movements. Slow tölt is slow, but it is not without energy. The horse has to be extremely well balanced and strong to execute a perfect slow tölt. The speed is such that you could imagine riding a volte (a small circle) at this speed. If the tölt gets too slow, sometimes the horse ends up with an incorrect beat—one that is closer to walk than a true clear beated tölt.

Slow to medium speed tölt is nearly identical to slow tölt; however, the faster the horse goes, the more extended the head and neck can become to allow the horse's shape to naturally adjust to the higher speed. This speed of tölt is ideal for many horses (but not for all). The horses don't have to be as collected as they need to be for a slow tölt, but they also don't need to have the excellent balance and endurance required for fast tölt.

What is fast tölt? The main gait description is the same: The horse should go in an

even four beat rhythm, which runs fluidly through the horse. At the faster speed, however, the horse should lengthen its strides and the head and neck should become more extended than in slow tölt. As in any speed of tölt, the horse's whole topline should be strong and without tension. The horse should move in balance, with a strong and active back and active hindquarters, showing suppleness and fluid movements.



Shannon Hughes and Asi from Mill Farm showing a moment of clear suspension at the trot. Photo by Deb Cook.

To score high, the fast tölt needs to be fairly fast, but keep in mind that, no matter what, you should never sacrifice a good beat and a healthy form. To perform a fast speed tölt, the horse needs to be very strong, well balanced, and in great condition; it needs endurance and must be forward thinking.

TROT

Slow trot is probably faster than you think. To perform a slow to medium speed trot, the horse should go in a clear two-beat diagonal rhythm, with clear suspension and good energy, ideally remaining "on the bit." The horse has an arched neck and is rounded, with a relaxed topline. It goes forward in balance and with suppleness and roomy strides, with the impulsion originating from the activity of its hindquarters. Its back is elastic and the movement runs through the horse's body.

At medium speed, the horse goes energetically forward with clearly lengthened steps, but without hurrying. The rider allows the horse to carry its head a little more in front of the vertical than at the slow trot, and to lower its head and neck slightly to allow the horse to adjust to the faster movement.

CANTER

Slow canter is an even three beat gait with a clearly visible moment of suspension. The horse should have an arched neck, a rounded, relaxed topline, be "on the bit,"

and have actively engaged hindquarters. The forehand is light and unconstrained. At the medium speed, the horse lengthens its strides without hurrying, and the rider allows the horse to carry its head a little more in front of the vertical and to lower its head and neck slightly, compared to the slow canter.

When cantering in competition, it is always important to be on the correct lead (left lead canter versus right lead canter), since the wrong lead (as well as cross cantering) will impact your score greatly. It is interesting to know that five gaited horses and four gaited horses are judged by the same standards when cantering, although it is usually easier for a four gaited horse to show a clear three beat canter.

PICKING YOUR CLASS

How do you pick the best four gait class for you and your horse? As you think about what classes to enter at the next show, make sure you know first what classes you and your horse are eligible for. Then think about the speeds of tölt that your horse can perform. Do you have a slow tölt? If you are considering V1, V2, or V3, you will need it. Do you have the fast tölt needed for V1 and V2? Or not quite? If not, you may want to stick with a class that allows you to show a medium speed or any speed tölt.

What is your horse's temperament like? Is he or she a horse with rather low energy who would benefit from riding in a group, or do you think you may have your hands full if somebody is passing you, possibly even causing you to lose your gait if your horse tenses up or gets too ambitious?

And what do you like? Perhaps your horse can do all of the gaits, but you would feel more comfortable in a group. Or have you always wanted to ride by yourself in an individual program?

If you are working with an experienced riding instructor, he or she may have some good advice about what classes might work best for you and your horse.

Editors' Note: Alex Pregitzer is a USIHC Sport Judge B; Deb Cook, a USIHC Sport Judge C, also contributed to this article. "In putting together this article," Alex notes, "I relied heavily on the wording and information found in the USIHC and FEIF sport rules and guidelines, adding some of my own thoughts and explanations." You can find links to these rules in the Sport Resources sidebar.

SPORT RESOURCES

Do you want to compete in an Icelandic horse show, but don't know where to begin? You will find that there is a wealth of information available online.

On the FEIF website (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' hooves 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.

The FEIF manual combines the General Rules and Regulations and the Sport Rules and Regulations (formerly called FIPO). Note that the Sport Rules and Regulations begin on page 88 and are not listed in the first table of contents (which only pertains to the General Rules and Regulations); page down until you see the red margin. Download the complete manual at: [https://www.feiffengur.com/documents/General_Sport2019\(1\).pdf](https://www.feiffengur.com/documents/General_Sport2019(1).pdf)

On the USIHC website (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.

Links to all the rules of sport competitions in the U.S. can be found here: <https://www.icelandics.org/rules/>

Still confused about what, exactly, the judges are looking for? To assess a performance, 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. 5. Outline and movements. Each of these elements is described in detail in the first article in our Sport 101 series; see Issue Two 2018 of the *Quarterly*.

You can also download the FEIF Sport Judges Guidelines at:

https://www.feiffengur.com/documents/sj_guidelines2019.pdf



Ayla Green (left) and Biven Chapman showing walk on Kiljan from Helms Hill and Brána frá Lækjarmóti. Photo by Deb Cook.

THINK SAFETY

BY LISA MCKEEN

Riding horses is not a “safe” activity by definition, and many of us have non-horsey families who worry about our passion. I call it a passion because, for the great majority of Icelandic horse owners, riding is so much more than a hobby or an activity. It is a lifestyle. We’re not going to stop riding just because it’s not “safe.” But we owe it to ourselves and our beloveds (both the two-legged ones and those with four legs) to do what we can to come home intact after each ride.

Seldom, for example, do you find

someone in a group of Icelandic horse owners riding without a helmet. In fact, our Hestafolk Icelandic Horse Club members felt so strongly about this piece of safety equipment that we voted to require helmets on all club rides. Without making a strong statement about safety, we felt we wouldn’t be doing our duty to promote the kind of riding we want to see. Helmets are also required at all USIHC-sanctioned shows.

I started wearing a helmet in 1999, when I boarded a horse at a facility that required them. Kim, the barn owner, was

also an emergency room nurse. She had evidence that her insistence on helmets, even in a town largely filled with Western riders, was justified. I’m so grateful to her for helping me change my mindset to a safer way of being with horses. When I asked friends in our Icelandic community when they started wearing helmets, their answers were all over the place. Some had worn them all along because they were English riders before getting into Icelandics. Some were bike riders who understood how quickly things can happen. In my experience, western riders were and are, by far, the most resistant to wearing helmets. (I include myself in that group.) The wearing of helmets can raise a discussion in many traditional horse groups to this day. But making that change before I turned 50, and keeping with it every year since, has enabled me to keep riding. As we age, we have to work a bit harder at balance, quick reaction times, addressing pain from old injuries, and noticing all the potentially startling things we ask our horses to ignore.

BEYOND HELMETS

For the same reasons we wear helmets, many of us are now wearing protective vests. My first vest came after a bad fall off a bolting horse. I was grateful I had a helmet on and wasn’t hurt badly, but my husband mentioned to me that I might think about more protection for my back and ribs. His experience with motorcycle riding makes the wearing of safety equipment commonplace. Like my barn owner, my husband also had data to back up his suggestion: A friend’s wife had broken several ribs and bones in her back in a horse-riding accident.

So I bought a Tipperary vest and promised to wear it. This vest has shock-absorbing foam material in many small closed cells. I was wearing it on my next hard fall: Galloping my Icelandic, a rabbit crosses our path, Sali goes left, while I go right and into a hard landing on my back. My ribcage and back were fine, thanks to the vest; the bruising was on my right buttock and thigh. That convinced me safety vests are worth wearing on each ride.



Add a little extra protection to your rides with a safety vest. Here, Judy Skogen and Freya from Extreme Farm enjoy the trail. Photo by Dave Pratt.

Next I invested in a Point Two Air Vest. An air vest is activated when you fall. A strap that connects to your saddle holds a firing mechanism closed. When your fall pulls the cord loose—pop!—the air canister is punctured and air fills the channels in your vest as you fall. The timing differs for different models, but it's not more than a fraction of a second for each.

Could that pop! when the vest fills spook your horse and make things worse? I wanted to know, so I deployed the vest while standing beside my horse. Yes, I was willing to waste a \$40 air cartridge to know. My horse had no reaction to the pop! The noise is softer than you might expect.

What about bucking or just losing your balance? I have been bucked around a bit while wearing my vest, but it only deployed when I actually fell. Two things help with that: One is that the cord is stretchy, so it gives you a bit of room to be off balance. The second is that it is your own body weight that pulls the cord out of its socket and makes the vest deploy. It blows up so fast your horse doesn't have much time to react. You falling off will be more disconcerting to your horse than having your air vest deploy.

My air vest, along with my helmet, saved my life three years ago when I fell into a pole fence, breaking through the center pole with my thigh and back and hitting my head on the top rail. I am lucky to be riding again and I don't get on without a vest. Ever. My family, who cared for me during the extended healing time, deserve this commitment. As I've aged, I also notice how much longer it seems to take me to heal. I also deserve that commitment, as do my horses. So now I wear a safety vest on every ride. If I competed in Icelandic horse shows, I'd wear one there too: According to the USIHC Sport Committee, nothing in our Show Rules forbids the wearing of safety vests.

OTHER VIEWS

Many of the people I ride with in the Hestafolk and Cascade Clubs wear safety vests too. I asked them to share their experiences.

"I decided to buy a vest about two years ago when my husband expressed concerns about my riding without enough protection," said Hestafolk's Judy Skogen. "He wanted me to buy stiff motorcycle



Anneke Chapman is ready for a trail ride aboard her Sola from Sand Meadow, wearing her Point Two Air Jacket. Note the vest's attachment to the front of the saddle. Photo by Nicki Esdorn.

safety gear, which wouldn't work for me. But I started wearing a Kan Teg Body Protector. It is a hard vest from England which is made to fit women, so was comfortable. About a year later I bought the Advantage Hit Air Vest. My cousin, who does eventing, has one and is happy with it. She had had a few accidents where it actually deployed, and she wasn't hurt. I chose the Hit Air because it was supposed to have more neck protection than the Point Two Air Vest, and I feel very comfortable in it. It feels like I am not wearing a safety vest at all." The only disadvantage, Judy says, "is that I can't just get on anyone else's horse unless they have a plug-in for my vest, although I can buy extra straps if I want to ride another horse or saddle."

Cascade Club member Diane Graves borrows her mother's safety vest. "My mom bought a Hit Air vest five years ago, after coming off a horse and injuring her ribs," she said. "I borrow it a few times a year when it feels like there's a high likelihood of a horse being squirrely, like on a bright windy day when the horses are spooky and jumpy or when I'm working with a green horse. I'm also more likely to wear it if I'm going out alone on a trail ride."

Cascade Club member Sharon Patterson had always worn a closed-cell foam vest before buying a Hit Air vest. "When I started trailriding Elska, I wore my Hit Air vest for the first 20 rides," she said. "She was perfect from Day One, so I quit wearing the Hit Air and went back to just wearing the foam vest."

"When our German exchange student came here to ride with me for a year, her mom made sure she brought her safety vest," said Linda Wallitner, a member of the Hestafolk club. "It was the first time I'd seen one." Linda started wearing a vest herself after a bad fall. "Once I was able to get back on, I started riding with a vest. I did a lot of research before buying one, mainly paying attention to what other people who wore them thought. I decided to purchase the Tipperary vest because of the side corset-style ties. It's lightweight, yet strong, and has a lot of padding. The back is longer than the front, but it doesn't hit my saddle. It is surprisingly comfortable—with a T-shirt underneath, a regular shirt easily fits over it. I haven't found a downside, but the upside is that I'll probably never fall off, again, now that I'm wearing it. Right?"

Kathy Lamb of the Cascade Club said, "I wear a certified Tipperary Eques-



R.J. Argenzio-West wears her Point Two Air Vest (in suitable red) while foxhunting on Gloinn from Rivendell. Photo by Andrew Towell.

trian Competitor II. Since I am short it's the only safety vest I have tried that doesn't hit the back of my saddle at all gaits. I do limited-distance endurance riding, general trail riding, and camping with my Icelandic mare. When I think about both of my accidents, I am very aware that, though they happened on my own property, in places the horses were used to, there was little I could have done to change the chain of events outside of being in better balance at that exact moment. The horses were not green. I am not a novice rider. But the reaction of both horses was not something I would have predicted. We don't plan an accident, but I can and do prepare to minimize damage should one occur. I wear my helmet and vest, every ride. My healing at 64 is slower than it once was, and I value my family enough to do my best to avoid injury."

CHOOSING A VEST

There are many vests on the market. How do you choose? Members in our clubs use either the Tipperary, Hit Air, or Point Two vests. When asked why they chose one over the other, the answers are generally because they liked the support from the company in helping to fit the vest or that they knew someone who recommended

it. Which vest felt the most comfortable was also a factor.

Many tack stores now carry the Tipperary vests, or other foam-type safety vests that cushion falls. The store staff can advise you on proper fitting, but you'll also want to research what situations the different models are designed for to find the one that meets your needs. Talk to folks that own them and, if you can, borrow one to try out.

Hit Air has a website at <https://www.hitairequestrian.com/contact-us.html> and a Facebook page. They make it easy to find answers or to contact them if you have questions, but they unfortunately didn't respond to my questions before I needed to submit this article.

Point Two has a website at <https://pointtwoairvests.com/> and you can find them on Facebook as well. The company responds to calls and emails quickly, and representative Tracey Winter was willing to answer my questions for this article.

Point Two started making equestrian vests in 2009, she explained. "Initially, they were primarily purchased by the eventing community. However, with the increasing awareness of the importance of safety, they are now being purchased by participants of all disciplines: hunting,

jumping, dressage, endurance, and trail riding."

Why are safety vests becoming more popular with riders? Tracy pointed out the difference between today's concern for safety, versus the stigma of wearing a safety product in the past. "The concern for safety continues to rise and people now place increasing priority on it—similar to how in the past the majority of people didn't wear helmets, whereas now the vast majority of people do. More professionals are taking the lead in setting the example of safety being 'smart' not only for them, but for their students and the general equestrian public. We are hopeful that more and more people will realize that being smart is taking advantage of the technology that is available to help people do what they love and be as safe as possible."

When asked what made Point Two's vests different, Tracy had several answers. First, they were designed with the help of a back surgeon. (He is Michael Turner, Chief Medical Officer of the company.) "They have a continuous airbag that offers protection to critical areas of the spine."

Second, they are tested to a high standard: "We are very proud that all our vests are tested to the SATRA M38 standard. SATRA, along with the Injured Jockey Fund, Dr. Turner, and Point Two, carried out extensive research to develop the M38 & M39 jockey vest standard. We believe all air vests should be tested to this standard, so that customers know they are purchasing a safe and reliable product."

Third, Point Two air vests have a fast inflation rate (of .8 milliseconds). "That is 3-4 times faster than any other vest on the market," Tracy said, "with twice as much pressure." (You need pressure to protect.)

Finally, she pointed out Point Two vests are serviced in the U.S., whereas other vests must be sent out of the country. "When people send their vests to us to be serviced," she said, "we completely dismantle the vests, clean them, test them, and put in a brand new airbag every time, so our customers can ride with confidence."

Whichever vest you choose, be safe when you ride! You are worth everything to your horses and family and friends.

RIDERS OF THE MONTH

BY JANET MULDER

The Sea 2 Shining Sea Ride is a virtual trail ride organized by the USIHC Leisure Riding Committee. You can join by emailing leisure@icelandics.org. There is an active Facebook page, where participants share photos and stories of their experiences riding their Icelandic horses in the U.S. There are awards for achieving specific landmarks along our virtual trail, as well as a rider being chosen each month to be highlighted in the *Quarterly*. The current ride, following the Pony Express and Butterfield Overland Mail routes, has been extended to the end of December 2019, and team member swaps will be available in July. Check the USIHC website for the most up-to-date information and the full rules.

FEBRUARY RIDER OF THE MONTH

Iris R. Heidberg lives in Boulder, CO with her horse Vina from Curtis.

Q. Why did you join the Sea 2 Shining Sea Ride?

Vina and I do a lot of trail riding on our own. Joining a trail riding group and posting pictures of our rides sounded like fun, plus I would keep track of our miles. I wanted to connect with other Icelandic horse lovers and be a part of a team.

Q. What are your goals?

We will continue dressage lessons, which have helped Vina's gaits tremendously! I hope to do some light competitions with Vina, too, just to show her off. I am also interested in endurance riding, since Vina is so great on the trails. My goals for myself are to continue to improve my riding skills.

Q. What do you enjoy about trail riding?

Vina and I love to be out in nature, on our own or with other gaïted horses. Vina is always the group leader, which gives us both so much confidence. She is simply the best!

Q. What made you interested in Icelandic horses?

I was born and raised in Iceland and have always loved the Icelandic horse. However, it was not until age 54 that my dream came true and I got my Vina. I could not have asked for a better horse.



Iris Heidberg and Vina from Curtis out on the trail.

She has taught me so much.

Q. What other activities do you do with your Icelandic horse?

Trail riding is our thing! We also do liberty play, dressage, poles, and cavalettis. We keep working on things that improve our trail riding skills.

MARCH RIDER OF THE MONTH

Ron Hoover lives in Litchfield, OH along with his eight Icelandic horses: Gæfa frá Hafsteinsstöðum, Stella Luna from Joint Creek, List frá Hrafnhólum, Glóð frá Brimilsvöllum, Kvika from Four Winds Farm, Eldrottning from Beat N' Branch, Hríma from Beat N' Branch, and Þorinn from Beat N' Branch. His herd is expecting three foals in 2019.

Q. Why did you join Sea 2 Shining Sea?

It's a fun and friendly competition, and I wanted to see how many hours I spent on the trails.

Q. What are your goals?

My goals are to raise and train the best possible trail and competition Icelandic horses that are American bred and raised in the U.S. We breed first-prize five-gaïted stallions to our first prize mares, and feel that these candidates are easier to train and have a pre-disposition

to be five-gaïted.

Q. What do you enjoy about trail riding?

The freedom of the trails and the nature that surrounds us are always what I enjoy, especially when my grandson wants to race at full-out flying pace—what fun that is!

Q. What made you interested in Icelandic horses?

Of course, the tölt gait and the temperament of these horses are the best. I've trained ponies and horses since I was six years old and the Icelandics are the best of the lot.

Q. What other activities do you do with your Icelandic horses?

We camp and trail ride, and we also pull carts in the summer and sleds in the winter. During show season I love to show my young horses in the green horse classes and, of course, I always try to get into the beer tölt class—the beer is always good, even if I do not win. I also enjoy the costume class!



Ron Hoover and Kvika from Four Winds Farm in a costume class. Photo by Valerie Durbon.

HORSES OF THE GODS

BY NANCY MARIE BROWN

The Icelandic horse is a Viking horse, we like to say, purebred since the Vikings settled Iceland a thousand years ago. But what did the Vikings value in a horse?

We can find some answers in Norse mythology. Horses were sacred to the old religions of northern Europe. When Iceland was settled between 870 and 930, the gods most Scandinavians worshipped rode Shining One, Fast Galloper, Silver Forelock, Strong-of-Sinew, Shaggy Fetlock, Golden Forelock, and Lightfoot.

The gods of Day and Night drove chariots drawn by Skinfaxi (Shining Mane) and Hrimfaxi (Frosty Mane): The brightness of the sun was the glow of the day-horse's mane, while dew was the saliva dripping from Hrimfaxi's bit.

SLEIPNIR'S BIRTH

The most famous horse in Norse mythology is Odin's horse, Sleipnir. The name means something like "Slipper," because he slips along so quickly on his eight legs. In his Edda, the 13th-century Icelandic chieftain Snorri Sturluson tells two memorable stories about Sleipnir.

One day, he begins, a giant entered the gods' city of Asgard. He was a stonemason, he said, and offered to build the gods a wall so strong it would keep out any ogre or giant or troll. All he wanted in return was the sun and the moon and Freyja, the goddess of love, for his wife.

The gods talked it over, wondering how they could get the wall for free.

"If you build it in one winter, with no one's help," the gods said, thinking that impossible, "we have a deal."

"Can I use my stallion?" the giant asked.

Loki the Trickster replied, "I see no harm in that." The other gods agreed. They swore mighty oaths.

The giant got to work. By night the stallion hauled enormous loads of stone, by day the giant laid them up. The wall rose, course upon course. With three days left of winter, it was nearly done.

"Whose idea was it to spoil the sky by giving away the sun and the moon—not to mention marrying Freyja into Giantland?" the gods shouted. They wanted out of their



Illustration by Margot Apple.

bargain. "It's all Loki's fault," they agreed. "He'd better fix it."

Loki transformed himself into a mare in heat. That evening, when the mason drove his stallion to the quarry, his horse was uncontrollable. It broke the traces and ran after the mare. The giant chased after them all night and, needless to say, he got no work done.

Nor could he finish the wall the next day with no stone. His temper snapped. He flew into a giant rage.

The gods' oaths were forgotten. Thor the Thunderer raised his terrible hammer and smashed the giant's skull.

Eleven months later, Loki had a foal. It was gray and had eight legs. It grew up to be the best horse among gods and men. Odin claimed the foal for his own and called it Sleipnir.

THE RACE WITH GULLFAXI

One day Odin rode Sleipnir into Giantland, Snorri says in another tale. There a giant named Hrungrnir complimented him on his marvellously good horse.

"There's none in Giantland to match it, I'll bet," Odin snootily replied.

Hrungrnir took that badly. His horse Gullfaxi, or "Gold-Mane," had a much longer stride, he said. He leaped into the saddle and raced off after Odin. Sleipnir galloped so fast that Odin was over the hill in no time. But "Hrungrnir was in such a great giant fury," Snorri writes, "that the first thing he knew was that he had rushed in through the gates of Asgard." The giant reined his horse to a halt before the doors

of Valhalla. Odin invited him in for a drink.

Freyja gave the giant ale. "And when he became drunk," Snorri writes, "there was no lack of big words." The giant said he was going to level Asgard—except for Odin's great hall. He'd carry Valhalla back to Giantland as booty. But first he'd drink up all the gods' good ale. He hollered for more.

The gods hollered for Thor. He entered Valhalla with his hammer raised. "Who let a giant into Asgard?"

"Odin did," the giant answered, with a level stare. "I am his guest. Besides, you'll win no honor killing me unarmed."

Instead, Hrungrnir challenged Thor to a duel on the frontier of Giantland. He lost, of course, and Thor gave Hrungrnir's fine horse, Gold-Mane, to his three-year-old son.

WHAT THE VIKINGS VALUED

From these few myths, we can see the Vikings valued many of the same traits in a horse that we do. They loved their horses' many colors, especially gray, silver dapple, and chestnut with flaxen mane. They loved their long hair, their shaggy fetlocks and flashy forelocks. They loved their speed and lightness—both lightness of foot and being light on the bit—and their long, smooth strides. They loved their strength and stamina. They loved—or at least tolerated—their independent minds and strong personalities. And they loved the fact that the finest horse in Giantland could be ridden by a three-year-old.

Nancy Marie Brown spoke on "The Icelandic Horse in Myth and Saga" at the 2019 USIHC Annual Meeting.



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A rider wearing a helmet and dark riding clothes is mounted on a brown and white Icelandic horse. Several orange circles are overlaid on the image, highlighting specific pieces of riding equipment: the helmet, the horse's bridle, the rider's watch, the saddle, the rider's boots, and the stirrups.

PROTECT THE ICELANDIC HORSE FROM INFECTIOUS DISEASES

IMPORTING USED RIDING EQUIPMENT IS PROHIBITED

KEEP DISEASE OUT

As a result of its geographical isolation and strict import policies, Iceland has remained **FREE** from serious infectious diseases in animals. Please avoid introducing infectious agents to the country.

DO NOT ENTER ICELAND WITH:

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- used riding gloves or riding shoes

CLEANING AND DISINFECTION OF RIDING CLOTHES:

Used riding clothes must be washed in a washing machine or dry cleaned prior to entering the country.

Riding clothes and boots that cannot be cleaned this way must be washed and disinfected as follows:

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2. Dry
3. Spray with a wide spectrum disinfectant (effective against bacteria, fungi and viruses) as Virkon S (1%) or Septustin M (0,4%).
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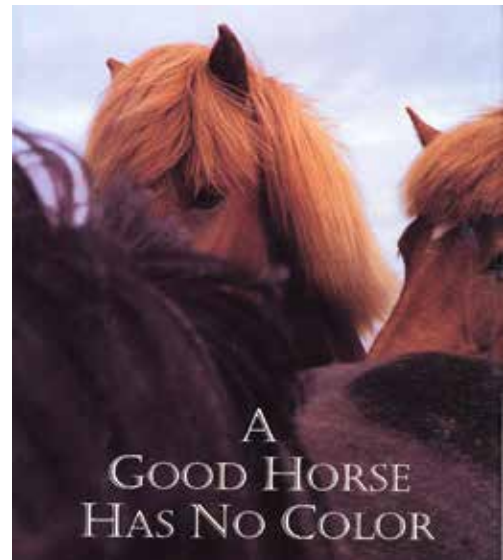
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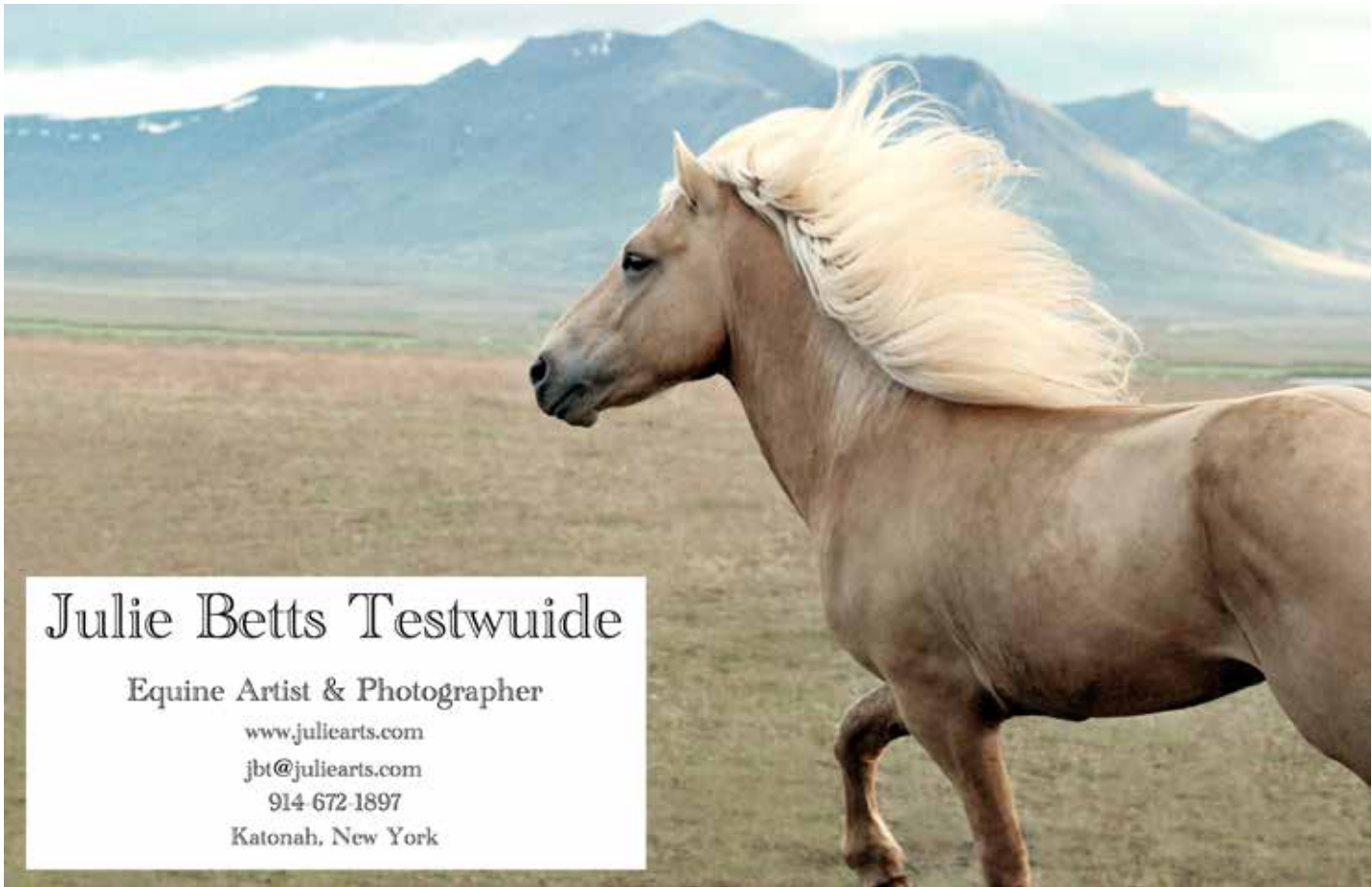
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