

Issue One

THE

2021

# 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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## 2021 Events

For more information and updates on our plans, email [Virginia@HarmonyIcelandics.com](mailto:Virginia@HarmonyIcelandics.com) to be added to our Events List!

### **BREEDING SEMINAR**

May 29-31 (Leader TBD)

### **OFFICIAL BREEDING & RIDING HORSE ASSESSMENT**

June 1-2 (Only official assessment scheduled in the U.S. for 2021; Judge to be assigned by FEIF)

### **MOCK BREEDING ASSESSMENT**

June 1-2

### **LESSONS, COACHING, EDUCATION**

June 3-4

### **SPORT SHOW**

June 5-6 (Judges: Will Covert, Silke Feuchthofen, Þorgeir Guðlaugsson)

### **WEEK OF THE ICELANDIC HORSE**

October 31-November 6 (Farm & facilities open to USIHC members; Educational opportunities offered)



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**2021 USIHC**  
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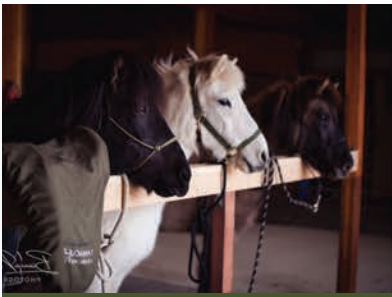
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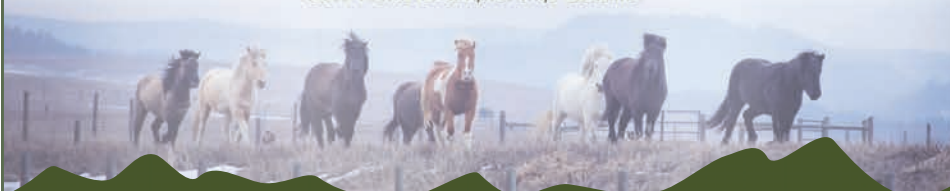
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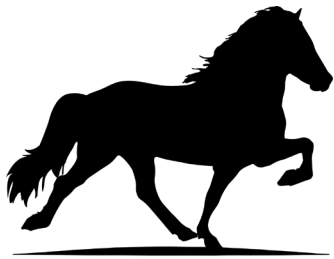
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# ICELANDIC HORSE

Q U A R T E R L Y

THE ICELANDIC HORSE QUARTERLY

Issue One 2021

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

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**On the cover:** The USIHC nominated Carrie Brandt of Taktur Icelandics as 2021 FEIF trainer of the year 2021. Here she shows off Sólmyrkva (Rós) from Helms Hill Farm (US2002203045), owned by Eileen Gunipero, together with her miniature horse Cookie. Look closely: no bridle! In the International Liberty Horse Association Online Championship 2020 for Liberty off a Ridden Horse, this team took first in the Novice and Intermediate divisions. Carrie says Cookie likes to annoy the Icelandics, but Rós has his number and the two love to work and play together. Photo by Shaila Sigsgaard.

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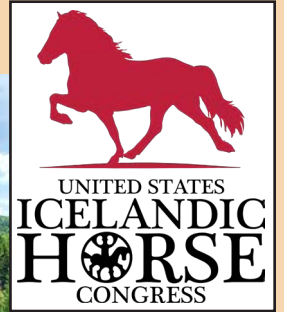


# THE USIHC MISSION

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

*The U.S. Icelandic Horse Congress is a member of FEIF ([www.feif.org](http://www.feif.org)), the International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations, representing the national Icelandic horse associations of 21 countries. FEIF governs competition activities and regulates the breeding and registration of Icelandic horses throughout the world outside of Iceland.*

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



## WHY JOIN THE USIHC?

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 for 14 affiliated clubs: 13 regional clubs and an activity club for 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 Program, 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."



# USIHC NEWS

## FALL VIRTUAL SHOW

The USIHC's Fall Virtual Show launched August 1 and accepted video submissions through December 4. It featured both National Ranking (sanctioned show) classes and Schooling Show classes, and offered seven Division Championships. This "ambitious initiative," as one of the judges put it, had 108 entries (79 National Ranking entries and 29 in the Schooling Show), representing over 70 horse-and-rider combinations from Alaska to Vermont, California to Kentucky, and everywhere in between.

The Division Champions (C) and Reserve Champions (R), based on their combined total score for one multi-gait class and one tölt class with the same horse were: Open Four Gait, Jeffrey Rose (C) and Isabelle Maranda (R); Open Five Gait, Sara Boehart (C) and Lori Cretney (R); Intermediate Four Gait, Suzi McGraw (C) and Lori Cretney (R); Novice, Karen Darrow (C) and Molly Stotts (R); Youth, Amelie Maranda (C) and Liesl Kolbe (R); Green Horse, Leslie Chambers (C) and Carly Conely (R).

Individual first-place winners and their scores in the Tölt classes were: T1, Isabelle Maranda (4.80); T2, Alexandra Dannenmann (5.83); T3, Jeff Rose (5.07); T4, Lori Cretney (4.63); T5, Suzi McGraw (5.93); T6, Kathryn Love (5.43); T7, Deb Kenny (5.20); PT, Deb Kenny (5.03); T8, Kamilla Brickner (5.70); TGH, Pam Spooner (5.43).

Winners of the Four Gait classes were: V1, Caeli Cavanagh (6.43); V2, Charlotte Reilly (5.77); V3, Lori Cretney (5.37); V5, Amelie Maranda (5.10); V6, Liesl Kolbe (5.23); VGH, Carrie Lyons Brandt (5.93).

Winners of the Five Gait classes were: F1, Ayla Green (6.13); F2, Carrie Lyons Brandt (5.20).

Winners of the Schooling Show classes were: SST7, Daria Peters (4.80); SST8, Casey Glover (4.00); SSPT, Debra Benanti (4.50); SSTGH, Leslie Chambers (5.50); SSV5, Daria Peters (5.10); SSV6, Tia Finch (4.50); SSVGH, Leslie Chambers (5.30); SSP4, Debra Benanti (4.60); SSP3, Chloe Riles (5.00).

For complete scores, see <https://>



An array of ribbons were won by members of the Vermont Icelandic Horse Farm at the USIHC Virtual Fall Show.

[icelandics.org/virtualshow/](https://icelandics.org/virtualshow/). For descriptions of the classes, see <https://icelandics.org/competition>.

The National Ranking classes were judged by five international FEIF Sport Judges: Þórgeir Guðlaugsson (from the Netherlands), Nicolai Thye (Denmark), Lutz Lesener (Germany), Hulda Geirsdóttir (Iceland), and Asa William (Sweden). The Schooling Show classes had one judge, Þórgeir Guðlaugsson.

Riders uploaded the videos of their tests and paid their entry fees electronically through a portal on the USIHC website. The videos had to follow this format: The camera was in the center of the riding area and continuously recorded the performance from the time the horse entered to when it left, keeping the horse and rider in the center of the frame with no zooming in or out. No edits, music, or commentary were allowed.

The 2020 Fall Virtual Show was supported by the USIHC and by 16 class and division sponsors, as well as by SmartPak, which donated nine \$50 gift cards. These were raffled off to entrants (one chance per class entered), with the winners being Leslie Chambers, Karen Darrow, Arianna DeForge, Debra Duvall, Ellie Flinn,

Virginia Lauridsen, Maria Octavo, Erika Tighe, and Annamaria Wallstrom.

Given the success of the 2020 Spring and Fall Virtual Shows, the USIHC Sport Committee has recommended to the board that we continue with two yearly virtual shows "even when in-person shows will be able to resume. This would allow riders more opportunities for collecting points for the national ranking," as well as making it easier for riders from all parts of the country to participate in competitions.

## 2021 SPRING VIRTUAL SHOW

The 2021 USIHC Spring Virtual Show will incorporate the tryouts for the Icelandic Horse World Championships (VM2021), which are scheduled to be held in Herning, Denmark on August 1-8.

Registration for the tryouts, as well as for the National Ranking and Schooling Show classes, will open on May 14 and riders can begin uploading their videos on May 21. Judging will be completed by June 5, and the U.S. National Team will be announced on June 10. See <https://icelandics.org/virtualshow/> for more information.

In the event that more than seven



riders qualify for the U.S. team, starting this year four places will be prioritized for U.S. residents. If more than five young riders qualify, three of the young rider spots will likewise be prioritized for U.S. residents.

### TRAINER OF THE YEAR

Each year the FEIF Education Committee runs an international contest for Icelandic Horse Trainer of the Year. For 2020, the USIHC is proud to nominate Carrie Lyons Brandt of Kentucky.

Carrie, shown on the cover of this issue, is a tireless promoter of the breed. As trainer, teacher, competitor, and ambassador, she has found creative ways to teach, guide, and inspire. Carrie possesses a unique talent for educating Icelandic horse owners about how to better understand the special qualities of the breed and she has been an invaluable resource for the growing community of Icelandic enthusiasts in the U.S.

Carrie was the second American student admitted to the equestrian science program at Hólar University in Iceland. She graduated in 2013 and received the Morgunblaðið Award. Carrie holds a



Krummi from Thor Icelandics was the Green Horse Division Champion in the USIHC Fall Virtual Show. Krummi was ridden by Leslie Chambers.

Bachelor of Science and is a certified FT Trainer and Instructor.

Carrie is extremely busy with her many endeavors to promote the Icelandic horse: her own training business, called Taktur Icelandics; the Gæðinga Dressage initiative; the Knights of Iceland promotional show team; and bringing educational opportunities to aspiring trainers in the Sleipnir Activity Club. She serves on the USIHC Education Committee and has donated countless hours helping to create a U.S. trainer certification program.

Carrie worked hard last year to develop the first ever USIHC virtual sport competitions. She also successfully coached her students in online liberty and bridleless competitions, and judged the first virtual Knapamerki Riding Badge tests. Finally, the highlight of her year was the No Stirrup November freestyle competition, below.

### NO STIRRUP NOVEMBER

While open to riders of all breeds, all levels, and all disciplines from around the world, the No Stirrup November competition organized by Laura Benson and Carrie Lyons Brandt through their Gæðinga Dressage initiative was especially popular with USIHC members (as you can see by reading the Club Updates in this issue).

Over 60 riders showcased their exemplary horsemanship, creativity, joy in their horses, and balance without stirrups in video entries in four divisions: youth, amateur, pro, and team. Their videos can be watched at <https://www.knightsofice-land.com/nostirrupnovember>.

As Laura and Carrie write, "Competition requirements were that the rider be without stirrups and show at least one speed control and directional control exercise." The freestyle performances were also scored on flow of performance, creativity (music, costumes, mood), harmony, fun factor, and balance without stirrups (which counted double).

In addition to Laura and Carrie, judges were Jessie Huijbers of Gröf Training Station in Iceland and Patrick Sullivan of Modern Day Horsemanship.

Winners of each division won a set of stirrups from Taktur Tack Boutique,

plus a dragon rider hat. Second and third place winners received a hat or t-shirt. The top five competitors also received medals.

USIHC member Alexandra Venable who, with her 26-year-old gelding Ægir, won the Most Harmonious Pair award, received 50% off a Gæðinga Dressage course and 50% off a CAS Equestrian Omega bareback pad. "Although it was difficult to select a winner," Laura and Carrie write, "our judges felt that this pair's performance was beautiful, deeply moving, and showed an incredible harmonious connection between horse and rider." Alexandra rode, not only with no stirrups, but with no bridle or saddle.

### YOUTH VIDEO

The "Tölt Alaska" youth team's submission to the 2020 international FEIF Movie Competition was singled out for its "charm." The video can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7k-wbuaz4Zw&feature=youtu.be>. Team members Mia Mulder, Koen Mulder, Iris Garrick, Cirrus Bunn, and Addie Bunn each received a \$25 Zazzle gift card from the USIHC in recognition of their efforts.

### UNREGISTERED HORSES

Riders whose horses lack the proper documentation needed for registration can now participate in USIHC events by applying for a "participation number."

Reports Virginia Lauridsen, "There are likely hundreds of unregistered Icelandic horses in the United States, and we would like to bring them into our community. Most of these horses are not able to be registered due to lost paperwork, missing stallion reports, or lack of registration as a foal."

To receive a participation number, the horse's owner must be a USIHC member and the horse must have a DNA test which confirms that it is a purebred Icelandic.

Says Virginia, "The USIHC has recently acquired ownership of the extensive DNA database of registered Icelandic horses in the U.S., and we are now able to match a DNA sample with that database to determine parentage. If the proper



documentation is missing, we cannot register a horse, but we can perhaps help the owners to do so.”

There will still be some instances where registration is not possible, but with a participation number the horse will be eligible to participate in clinics, the Sea2Shining Sea ride, and any non-ranking FEIF classes offered at competitions.

The participation number costs \$250 and is good for the horse’s lifetime. Should a horse with a participation number become eligible for full registration in the future, that fee will be applied to the cost of registration. For more information, contact the USIHC registrar at [registry@icelandics.org](mailto:registry@icelandics.org).

### BREEDING MANUAL

The USIHC Breeding Manual underwent its final review in January. As reported in our last issue, the manual is being produced by the Breeding Committee “primarily to help first-time breeders navigate the unknowns,” says committee chair Virginia Lauridsen, “but we are hoping everyone will find it interesting.”

All stallion owners will be sent copies to distribute to owners of mares bred to their stallions. USIHC members can also request a copy, which will be available in both print and digital formats.

Topics included in the manual are: breeding plan and goal, the importance of the mare, record keeping systems,



Congratulations to Koen Mulder and Iris Garrick of Alaska for earning the USIHC Riding Badge Basic Level 1. Their instructor was Janet Mulder, and the examiner was Bernie Willis. Here, Koen rides Viktoria from Creekside Farm and Iris rides Kolfinna frá Selfossi. Photo by Bryan Mulder.

insemination, care of the pregnant mare, foaling, training, Worldfengur, Virtual Mate, BLUP, the DMRT3 gene, foundation bloodlines, assessments, registering your horse, and ethical responsibilities.

### NEW USIHC STORE

The USIHC’s Zazzle store has branded clothing and household items uploaded and ready for purchase. Please see [https://www.zazzle.com/store/usihc\\_](https://www.zazzle.com/store/usihc_)

store. “We can add additional merchandise if members have ideas of what they would like to see or purchase,” notes Em Potts; contact her at [promotions@icelandics.org](mailto:promotions@icelandics.org).

### JUDGING SEMINARS

Taking an idea from Great Britain’s Icelandic Horse Association, the USIHC has established a Sport Judges task force to create a preparatory course for people interested in learning more about judging Icelandic horse competitions. “The idea is to develop a series of seminars and make use of Google Classroom for sharing material, such as videos, and posting assignments,” Martin Nielsen reports, adding that the Sport Committee “felt it would be a good idea to make the series open to everybody and not restrict it to judges or prospective judges.” The task force will discuss the idea with Þórgeir Guðlaugsson, who has led the Judging Seminars in the U.S. in recent years.

### SETTING THE PACE

At the November Sport Committee meeting, Carrie Lyons Brandt argued that pace riding should be encouraged more in the U.S. and suggested a number of initiatives. The committee supported her ideas, but pointed out that the 100m speedpace requires four judges, the 150m pace race takes five, and the pace test needs seven



Jeff Rose of Colorado was appointed to the USIHC Board of Directors to fill the seat left vacant by Kari Pietsch-Wangard’s retirement. Riding Vals frá Ósi, Jeff also was the Open Four Gait Division Champion in the USIHC Virtual Fall Show.



judges. As most shows in the U.S. have only one or two judges, it is a challenge to accommodate these classes in U.S. shows. The committee agreed to discuss these problems with FEIF judges and see if they can come up with a solution.

### NEW DIRECTOR

Three seats on the USIHC board of directors were up for election in 2020. As the Election Committee received no nominations by the October 1 deadline, Will Covert and Lori Cretney were automatically reelected. The board has recruited Jeff Rose to fill the seat of Kari Pietsch-Wangard, who chose not to run for re-election.

Wrote director Leslie Chambers, "The board is extremely grateful to Kari for her many years of dedicated service and for playing the crucial role of USIHC treasurer. We also look forward to having Jeff join the board."

With Jeff's appointment, the USIHC

board now has representation from almost every part of the country: Janet (Alaska), Will (California), Jeff (Colorado), Virginia (Iowa), Martin (Kentucky), Leslie (New York), Lucy (Oregon), Em (Vermont), and Lori (Wisconsin).

Jeff is a lawyer from Longmont, CO, and has been active in the USIHC Virtual Shows and as a board member of the Klettafjalla Regional Club. He and his wife, Abby, first started riding Icelandic horses with his parents at Winterhorse Park in Wisconsin and now board their horses at Tamangur.

### ANNUAL MEETING

The USIHC Annual Meeting was held virtually by Zoom on February 20. The program consisted of committee reports, followed by a Q&A session. Also on the schedule were presentations by Lucy Nold on the new DNA registry setup and by Carrie Brandt on a check-list for preparing virtual shows.

### BOARD MEETINGS

The USIHC Board of Directors met by Zoom call on November 10, December 8, and January 12. Complete minutes, including the monthly Treasurer's and Secretary's reports, committee reports, and the annual budget, can be found online at [icelandics.org/minutes](https://icelandics.org/minutes). USIHC members are encouraged to listen in on board meetings. The agenda and information on how to connect are posted on the USIHC website the weekend before.

In addition to the topics reported on above, the board clarified the competition rules to allow a horse to compete as a "Green Horse" for two years. Likewise, in the "Beginning Rider" division, the new rules state that "any non-professional rider is eligible for this division for two consecutive calendar years starting with their first participation in a live National Ranking show (or its equivalent). These riders would then graduate to Novice."

The board discussed a proposal to financially support breeding shows, sending it back to the Breeding Committee for more information. It approved the Breeding Committee's motion that new members of its committee be required to complete a breeding seminar (either live or virtual); the committee is preparing a virtual seminar for 2021.

The DNA Registration Committee updated the board on their work to create a pathway for presently unregistrable Icelandic horses to be registered. The committee is also working on including genetic tests relevant to the Icelandic breed on the list of tests offered through the USIHC's agreement with the University of California-Davis genetic testing lab; this lab currently handles all Icelandic horse DNA testing in the U.S.

The Leisure Committee announced its plans for the 2021 Sea2Shining Sea ride (see <https://icelandics.org/sea-2-shining-sea-ride>); as of January, 92 riders and 18 teams had signed up. The U.S. Trainer Certification Committee also updated the board on its progress.

Will Covert and Martin Nielsen were chosen to represent the USIHC in the virtual FEIF Delegates Assembly on February 13. Finally, the board continued reviewing the USIHC policies for anti-discrimination. The 2021 USIHC budget meeting was scheduled for February 9.



Congratulations to Alexandra Venable and Ægir for winning "Most Harmonious Pair" in the No Stirrup November challenge.



## THE RIDER'S WEIGHT

Icelandic horses have been bred for centuries for agricultural use and riding over long distances. Despite their relatively low height at the withers and their resulting lower weight compared to other horse breeds, Icelandic horses are a strong, resilient, and sturdy breed.

Recently, the Veterinary Association for Animal Welfare in Germany has updated its leaflet on rider weights. As there is no simple answer to the question of how much weight a horse can carry without damage, the Veterinary Association examines this difficult topic from several points of view to give horse owners reasonable criteria for dealing with it in practice.

Based on the latest scientific studies, the height at the withers is not the only criterion for how heavy a rider the horse can carry. A more detailed evaluation of the actual load-bearing capacity of a horse can be obtained by looking at, for example, the width of the loins and the circumference of the cannon bone. Research from Germany has shown that the general weight bearing index of the Icelandic horse may be somewhat higher, compared to that of similar breeds. This needs to be studied further.

The FEIF breeding goals for Icelandic horses continues to put a clear emphasis on a strong, broad, and well-muscled back, with strong and broad loins, and on robust legs with well-developed joints and bones. Moreover, the actual weight bearing capacity of the horse is included in the breeding goal. It is also interesting to note here that the



Icelandic horse has become taller in recent years. The average horse that came to a FEIF breeding assessment in 1990 was 133 cm at the withers, but is now around 142 cm.

The answer to the question about the resilience of a horse is as individual as the horses are themselves. It depends on many different factors, as is emphasized by the scientific papers published in the European journal *Animal*, authored by staff members of the Equine Science Department at Hólar University College in Iceland, in cooperation with the Swedish Agricultural University Uppsala (SLU).

In addition to the body weight and size of the horse, these factors include: age, level of training and muscular condition, gaits, the ridden speed, and the conformation of the horse. Not least, the balance and riding style of the rider play a decisive role.

Other factors, such as type of use, duration, and intensity of the riding activity; or even seemingly unimportant factors such as weather, season, and soil conditions, have an influence on the weight bearing capacity of the horse.

Thus, the assessment of a horse's resilience is an individual matter. If in doubt, you should consult the appropriate experts (e.g., veterinarians, trainers, farriers, or physiotherapists). Of greatest importance are to take a sympathetic approach in dealing with the horse, proper training methods for both horse and rider, and the use of common sense.

Hólar University College, in co-operation with further partners in and outside of



Iceland, has currently started a new scientific study on this topic. The findings will be incorporated into FEIF's considerations and regulations as soon as the results are published.

## VM2021

Many Icelandic horse enthusiasts have probably been wondering whether there will be a World Championship this year, and what will happen to the tickets already purchased in case the number of spectators and/or of seats in the grandstand is limited by the Danish authorities because of Covid-19.

To answer these questions, the German IPZV interviewed the organizers of the World Championships 2021, Hestar Event, which is operated by Lone Bertelsen, Stine Sandahl, Ole Søgård, and Rasmus Møller Jensen. You can read the full interview here: [vmdenmark.com/ipzv-interview-with-hestar-events](https://vmdenmark.com/ipzv-interview-with-hestar-events)

The 2021 Icelandic Horse World Championships (VM2021) are scheduled to be held in Herning, Denmark on August 1-8 and, the organizers tell us, the preparations are in full swing—even though right now it is difficult to foresee the Covid-19 situation in the summer of 2021.

Selection of the judges to form the 2021 World Championships Sport Jury has been completed; they are: Birgit Quaschnitschka, Hinrik Már Jónsson, Hörður Hákonarson, Lisa Olovsson, Lutz Lesener, Nicolai Thye, Peter Häggberg, Sophie Kovac, Stefan Hackauf, and Valdimar Auðunsson. Reserve judges are: Ólafur Árnason, Katharina





Konter, and Anna Andersén. Chief judge is Þorgeir Guðlaugsson; deputy chief judge is Will Covert.

Both FEIF and the World Championship organizing committee stress that they are completely committed to holding this year's competition. "Planning is well underway, including designing the venue and the schedule of events; recruiting volunteers, merchants, and suppliers; selling tickets, etc., but we are developing different scenarios and solutions to comply with any restrictions and recommendations which may be imposed by the Danish authorities. We take the Covid-19 situation very seriously, and it is important to us that, from arrival to departure, a visit to the VM2021 remains safe and responsible."

You can buy tickets, as long as the supply lasts, at <https://www.sporti.dk/en/ticket.php?e=85>. You can keep updated at [www.vmdenmark.com](http://www.vmdenmark.com), on Facebook, and on Instagram.

## YOUTH VIDEOS

In the summer of 2020, FEIF invited all its member countries to run a video competition for groups of young people under 18 years of age. The theme was: "Dreaming of...."

The aim was to foster teamwork and collaboration, encourage good horsemanship and continuous learning, raise awareness of the international aspects of the Icelandic horse world, develop the imagination, and promote perseverance to manage and com-



plete a project.

The international jury invited to judge the videos found all of the submissions to be outstanding!

First prize went to the Austrian team "Isi-Girls" for "Dreaming of Horses." The story is, of course, about Icelandic horses, but also about happy youngsters, fun times, and sunny days! There is just one thing missing... Watch the video and find out what it is!

In second place, we find another Austrian team, "Ponyhofgang." Their entry is called "Dreaming of a world where dreams can come true." Imagine a world where everybody can live their dream and be what they want to be. That is what we all dream, isn't it?

The U.S. team "Tölt Alaska" created a video called "I am dreaming of..." In it we meet a wonderful group of youngsters who share their stories with us and let us know that dreams do come true with an Icelandic horse!

Please go to FEIF/Youth Work to access the videos, at [www.feif.org/2020/12/24/feif-video-competition-2020/](http://www.feif.org/2020/12/24/feif-video-competition-2020/)

## HORSE WELFARE

Alexandra Montan Gray, head of PR and Communications in FEIF, attended the online World Horse Welfare Conference 2020, which took place on November 12. This year the theme of the conference was "The horse-human partnership: What's in it for the horse?" Several speakers were invited to shed light on the topic from different angles.

World Horse Welfare (

horsewelfare.org) is a charity organization with the mission "to work with horses, horse owners, communities, organizations, and governments to improve welfare standards and stamp out suffering in the UK and worldwide."

You can see the conference, with all the speakers, at <https://www.worldhorsewelfare.org/about-us/our-organisation/our-conference>.

## NEW GB SPORT JUDGES

The Icelandic Horse Society of Great Britain (IHSGB) is pleased to announce four newly qualified Regional Sport Judges: Jemimah Adams, Mike Adams, Becca Hughes, and Harriet Vincent. This is the first time the IHSGB has been able to run a long-term sport judge training program, and the successful judges are the first to qualify in 20 years.

In February 2019, the IHSGB began a two-year online sport judge training program with international sport judge Fi Pugh. The participants studied the FEIF sport rules & regulations and the sport judge guidelines. They learned how to analyze the Icelandic horse's gaits by eye and with the help of LAP (lateral advanced placement) analysis, and to assess ridden performances both on video and at live competitions.

The IHSGB training program will continue, and the goal is for these Regional Sport Judges to be ready to take the FEIF National Sport Judges' exam in the future.

# CLUB UPDATES

There are 13 Regional Clubs and one Activity Club affiliated with the U.S. Icelandic Horse Congress. To find the Regional Club nearest you, see the USIHC website at [www.icelandics.org](http://www.icelandics.org). The following clubs filed updates on their activities this quarter.



Left, Caeli Cavanagh gave a webinar on the FEIF trainers matrix for the Sleipnir Activity Club. Right, Nicole Kempf's webinar was on Tölt Training.

## SLEIPNIR

by Carrie Brandt

Throughout 2020 Sleipnir, the Icelandic horse trainers guild, grew in membership. Our board has continued to brainstorm ways to create educational opportunities specific to the needs of trainers and instructors and to develop a sense of community, especially in the face of the challenges presented by Covid-19.

Our second webinar, held on April 19, featured Sleipnir president Caeli Cavanagh speaking about the FEIF trainers matrix. It was a huge success, and our members spent well over an hour afterwards discussing possible U.S. trainer certification systems. Caeli's presentation included sections on the German IPZV Trainer Certification system and Hólar University's system in Iceland; these are the two primary certifiers in the Icelandic horse community. She also discussed the international Pony Club, emphasizing their success in building a community around their system. In the post-lecture discussion, Sleipnir members

from all three systems presented their perspectives and shared their opinions on what elements might play a key role in building our own American certification process for Icelandic horse trainers and instructors.

For our third webinar, held on No-



ember 28, we were honored to present the German Ausbilder (FEIF Trainer Level 4), judge, and international competitor Nicole Kempf. The topic of Nicole's lecture was "Tölt Training." Nicole discussed what makes a good quality tölt and defined beat faults in the tölt, explaining their roots and providing solutions. Her lecture included many video examples of different quality tölt, and Nicole gave extensive training advice on all aspects of problem-solving when training a horse for its best quality gait. Around 30 up-and-coming Icelandic horse professionals, Sleipnir members, and associate members attended the lecture, and it was very well received. A big thank you to Nicole and to Montaire LLC for donating their time to Sleipnir and supporting North American trainers with this educational content.

Sleipnir plans to continue to host virtual educational opportunities for its members in 2021. Follow us on Instagram ([sleipnir\\_trainersguild](https://www.instagram.com/sleipnir_trainersguild/)) or Facebook (Sleipnir: The Icelandic Horse Trainer Guild of North America) to stay up to date.

## ALASKA

by Janet Mulder

The start of winter in Alaska was a good one, with snow falling in October and the footing for riding staying good. In October, our Alaska Icelandic Horse Association held a small "Horsey Halloween" celebration, with mounted horse games including Donut Munch and Musical Feedbags.

In November our youth group, Tölt Alaska, began its first monthly challenges. "No Stirrup November" was the first challenge, followed by December's "The Rider's Aids." For these challenges the young riders were given a list of questions to answer and riding skills to practice, a Zoom meeting followed to discuss each rider's experience.

Riders from Alaska also participated in the USIHC's Virtual Fall Show, with a total of eight entries coming from our club. Three of our riders also participated in the "No Stirrup November" video challenge organized by Gaedinga Dressage and CAS Equestrian. (See the USIHC News section in this issue for more about these shows and links to the videos.)

We are grateful for these virtual opportunities to continue working with our horses, and are looking forward to more in-person, as well as virtual, events in 2021!



Mia Mulder riding Skjomi from Tölt Away in the low light of an Alaskan afternoon. Photo by Janet Mulder.





Nicole Beck riding Kolfinna frá Selfossi past an Alaskan Christmas display. Photo by Janet Mulder.



Charlotte Reilly competed on Mirra frá Kambi in the USIHC Virtual Fall Show.

## FRIDA

by Marilyn Tully

By comparison to other years, the final quarter of 2020 was quiet for the Frida

Icelandic Riding Club's members in the Mid-Atlantic Region. Most of us went on trail rides whenever we could, or worked with our horses in a riding ring.

Some of us participated in the USI-

HC's Virtual Fall Show. This was no small feat, as many of us do not have access to a competition track, nor are we handy with videotaping. Fortunately, there are ways to make it less cumbersome. Suzi McGraw, for example, bought a Pivo Pod Silver to help her prepare a video for the show. With this system, you don't need a cameraman. The Pivo holds your smartphone in place and tracks you as you ride your horse. It has a remote control, so you never have to get off your horse to start and stop the camera. Suzi says it's "well worth the investment."

FIRC members who participated in the Virtual Fall Show include Charlotte Reilly, Suzi McGraw, Leslie Chambers, Carrie Lyons Brandt, Carly Conley, Heidi Benson, Lori Cretney, Ayla Green, and Brynja Meehan. Congratulations!

Carrie Lyons Brandt and Laura Benson organized a new event this year for the Icelandic community called "No Stirrup November." No one is exactly sure of its origins, but throughout the equestrian world riders have been taking the no-stirrup challenge. Many will vouch for the fact that this will improve your seat position and strengthen your legs. Isn't that what riding is all about? The scored elements of the challenge organized by Carrie and Laura included speed control, directional control, overall flow of performance, creativity (costumes, music, mood), harmony/communication skills, and fun factor.

Charlotte Reilly entered two of her horses in the Amateur class, with Sprettur coming in 3rd out of a class of 20. Charlotte wanted to do something that would push her out of her comfort zone, and riding without stirrups would help her to have a closer connection with her horses and improve her balance. She said she came to realize how much you depend on your stirrups. "Yes, your thigh muscles might be screaming but it was worth the effort feeling a greater oneness with your horse."

Jo Ann Trostle came in 4th in the Pro Division. She also helped prepare six of her students for the No Stirrup November challenge. She told each of them to pick their music first, after which she helped them choreograph their routines. The rest of the preparation time was spent practicing their patterns. The personality traits and



riding goals of each of the students really shined through. Madeline Call had suffered a recent fall that made her somewhat timid of speed, and JoAnn said it was awesome to watch Madeline work with an older gelding. As he gained strength in the process, Madeline acquired improved balance and greater confidence. Liz Forrester, who has been working on Western riding with her mount Gypsy, highlighted barrel racing, to the sounds of “Baby Outlaw” by Ellie King. Jade Trostle, known to be very theatrical, performed with much flair backwards, sideways, and practically upside down to “Legion of Monsters” by Disturbed; she tied for 2nd in the Amateur class. Abby Weaver is training her horse to jump, so she set her routine to “Shatter Me” by Lindsey Stirling and navigated ground poles and small jumps. Mikayla Weaver, who has only been riding for a few months, made her routine look effortless as she sidestepped and tölted around in a costume depicting the Greek goddess Artemis. Everyone learned a lot, Jo Ann said. She echoed Charlotte Reilly’s sentiments that it pushes you out of your comfort zone and forces you to focus on your seat and legs.

Jo Ann Trostle also leads trail rides at Stargait Training in Lititz, PA, and she reports that the pandemic didn’t slow things down for these outdoor activities. She offered trail rides for everyone from beginners to intermediate to advanced riders, with treks ranging from one to four hours, depending on riding level. Some rides were on Jo Ann and Brad’s 65-acre farm. Other times they trailered to parks and trails, such as the Lebanon Valley Rail-Trail in Lancaster County, PA.

One of our members, Karen Azoff, who divides her time between Vermont and Virginia, recently added Skorri from Windsong, a striking-looking four-year old blue dun gelding to her growing herd of nine. Karen became interested in Icelandics during a vacation in Iceland, falling in love after the first tölt. Skorri has never been under saddle, and so Karen will send him for training in February.

With the pandemic still raging, the Frida Riding Club is planning a Zoom Kickoff Meeting this spring. Stay tuned.

## HESTAFOLK

by Lisa McKeen

What a year! I’m not feeling at all nostalgic about it passing! But, that said, some awesome things did happen here in Northwest Washington State in 2020. Small group lessons with Freya Sturm are always fun for those who can travel, and lots of us learned about Pivo (see the Frida Club’s description) and other ways of recording ourselves for distance learning.

One of our members owns Island Haven, a sanctuary for aging animals on San Juan Island. She has several Icelandic horses there, living out the rest of their lives on a lovely 40-acre farm. Island Haven is supported by donations and volunteers who live on the island. High school students help out there too—though, having worked in a public high school, I can tell you that the teens may benefit more than the animals. Caring for vulnerable animals shows who we are as humans and opens us to living more grateful and aware lives. Julie



Janet O’Connell took this photo of herself riding Vinur from Extreme Farms by remote timer.

Duke is immersed in that work.

We have some new horses in the club that we will enjoy meeting in 2021. Linda Wallitner has a new mare; Ashley Perigo has adopted Glodis from Alfasaga; and I



Icelandics like to get dressed up, says Serenity Perigo. Photo by Ashley Perigo.





Becky Sexton rides Villimey frá Lambafelli at Rancho De Puca. Photo by Leo Mattoni.

now have Vakning frá Ytri-Kongsbakka, who is the dam of my mare Salina from Evans Farms. Lisa Roland has brought Krakatindur frá Hæli from Iceland to be her replacement for Vakur, now retired. We also have a new member, Terri Mielke, who owns Dynur from Creekside Farm. It is so great to have a club to celebrate new horses with! One of the things most appreciated is the community that Icelandic horses bring.

Our southern contingent has been participating in fox hunts with the Woodbrook Club, where RJ Argenzio is a wonderful ambassador for our breed. She has gathered other Icelandic riders in the southwestern part of Washington for rides we are envious of and hope to attend in the future. The Icelandics are proving themselves to be hardy, willing, and brave fox-hunters. (Note that the “fox” they chase is a human runner.)

We hope to get a Hestafolk youth group going this year and are looking for youth riders to form a Sea2Shining Sea team. It’s fun for kids with Icelandic horses to meet and share ideas. Hopefully we can be penpals until we get the vaccine.

It was such a strange year that our club decided to roll membership fees into 2021 and lower any new memberships to \$10. We are rested up and ready for group rides. We miss our gatherings and will be better able to appreciate one another when we can gather again.

## KLETTAFJALLA

by Florie Miller

Looking back, it was an interesting year here in the Rocky Mountain Region. It wasn’t just a bad year, because a lot of good things happened as well. Overall, 2020 made everyone reevaluate their priorities in life—and for most of us, our first priority is our horses! They lift us up and keep us going. For the Klettafjalla Club this means that, despite all the cancellations of clinics, rides, demos, and competitions, we kept going. We added new members, and the number of horses we own grew too. Notably 14 horses were imported straight from Iceland to our region!

New members Rachel Clark and Krystin (age 11) joined us when they moved here from Washington State. They brought their horses Arabella, a recent import from Iceland, and their other mare, Björk. The Clarks enjoy the snow and the beautiful mountains of Colorado.

Lessons all over the region are now taught at a safe social distance and with face masks, if needed. The other, even safer, option is long-distance learning. The “Ask Guðmar” program seems to be popular with our club members. Several barns are also using the Pixem robot to allow for remote real-time lessons from anywhere in the world.

Competitions are online now as well. I participated in the “No Stirrup November



Pam Spooner and Kveikur from HEC won first prize in the USIHC Virtual Fall Show’s Green Horse Tölt class with a score of 5.43.

challenge” hosted by Gaeðinga Dressage and CAS Equestrian, and Tamangur Icelandics had seven horse/rider combinations enter the USIHC’s Virtual Fall show. All had very good results, and Klettafjalla members Deb Kenny, Pam Spooner, and Karen Darrow won first prize in their classes. Congratulations to them and their trainer, former club president Coralie Denmeade.

As always, please keep an eye on our social media pages for upcoming events. It looks like 2021 will be a great year!



Rachel and Krystin Clark with their mares Arabella and Björk.



## NEIHC

by Jennifer Bergantino

Fall in the Northeast is a glorious time. The footing is typically excellent, the light puts a certain type of glow on nature, and the beaches are open to equines at low tide. As if to spite the weirdness of the world, the riders of NEIHC explored and tried new things that brought us closer than ever to our amazing horses. We increased in numbers with new horses and new riders in every corner of the Northeast. Many of us logged hours and hours in the saddle for the USIHC's Sea2Shining Sea Ride. We rode without stirrups and without saddles. We improved our riding and competed virtually. We invented new competitions and hope they will become traditions. Some of us rode through fire and smoke, hitting a whole new level of bonding with our horses and confidence in ourselves.

NEIHC club members did exceptionally well in the USIHC's Virtual Fall Show, with a special shout-out to our youth members. Kamilla Brickner (age 10) of Solheimer Farm in Vermont, took 1st place in Youth Tölt (T8), with an impressive score of 5.7. Other youth riders also did well: Amelie Maranda (age 14) won 1st in Novice Four Gait (V5) and 2nd in Youth Four Gait (V6); Liesl Kolbe (age 10) won 1st in Youth Four Gait (V6); Arianna De Forge (age 11) took 3rd in Youth Four Gait (V6); Brynja Meehan (age 12) placed 3rd in Youth Tölt (T8); and Maya Fischl (age 10) placed 2nd in Schooling Youth Tölt (SST8). Amelie is



Alicia Flanigan and Funi having fun in a Maine snowstorm.

Youth Champion and Liesl is Youth Reserve Champion.

In the open and adult classes, Isabelle Maranda (age 17) took 1st in Open Tölt (T1) and 2nd (twice, with two different horses) in Open Four Gait (V1), making her the Division Champion for Open Four Gait. Leslie Chambers on Krummi from Thor Icelandics was the Champion in the Green Horse Division; she came in 2nd in Green Horse Tölt (TGH) and tied for 3rd in Green Horse Four Gait (VGH). Karen Winhold won 3rd place in Open Tölt (T1) and 3rd in Green Horse Four Gait (VGH).

In the schooling show, Debra Benanti took 1st in Pleasure Tölt and 1st in Pleasure

Four Gait, while Erika Tighe took 3rd in Four Gait Green Horse.

NEIHC members also brought their competitive skills to the "No Stirrups November" competition. Ona Kwiatkowski and Kjarkur placed 8th (of 20) in the Amateur Division. Ona reports that it was a "great opportunity and a fun way to connect with my horse. We've added more bareback riding into our daily routine and continue to practice. I can't wait to see where we'll be a year from now." Several NEIHC members signed up and practiced, finding the lack of stirrups improved their riding and their confidence. They look forward to competing next year.

NEIHC members also enjoyed the 2020 Sea2Shining Sea (S2SS) trail riding competition. Two NEIHC teams placed in the top five: Northcountry Tölter (Leah Greenberger, Ona Kwiatkowski, Jane Gately, Brigit Huwyler, Martina Gates, and Emily Potts) came in 2nd with over 5,000 miles, and Team Merrimack Valley Icelandics (Jennifer Bergantino, Phebe Kiryk, Nancy Rolfs, Andrea Smith, and Debra Benanti) came in 5th with over 3,700 miles. Of the 58 competitors, two NEIHC individual members placed in the top 10: Leah Greenberger in 5th and Jennifer Bergantino in 7th. We



Kamilla Brickner and Bylgja frá Sturlureykjum II won first place in the USIHC Virtual Fall Show's T8: Youth Tölt class with a score of 5.70. Photo by Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir.



Isabelle and Amelie Maranda and Liesl Kolbe enjoying a snowy ride in Vermont.





Ona Kwiatowski rode Kjarkur in the No Stirrup November Challenge.

Five horse and rider pairs from MVI—Jennifer Bergantino, Claudia Burnham, Phebe Kiryk, Charity Simard, and Andrea Smith—participated in what the “survivors” now call the “fire and noise clinic.” The three-day Mounted Police Training clinic certified these pairs in Basic Mounted Police Training. The group rode through fire and smoke, past flares, fireworks, moving obstacles, and over uneven footing. We even escorted, in drill formation, a police vehicle with lights flashing and sirens blaring! We could not have been prouder of our amazing horses, who passed with flying colors, trusting their riders and remaining calm in extraordinary circumstances. Spectators were highly impressed with our horses and even encouraged us to explore joining volunteer mounted units in our area.



Leah Greenberger and her new stallion, Blær from Sand Meadow.

look forward to S2SS 2021!

Merrimack Valley Icelandics (MVI) in Massachusetts has been very active and word of the Icelandic’s stamina, good looks, and fun is spreading in their area. In December, MVI held their “Winter Solstice Games.” Nine riders and several spectators had a wonderful socially distanced afternoon, enjoying a beer tölt, an obstacle course stay-in-gait competition, musical chairs, races, no stirrup challenges, pairs, and more. MVI hopes to evolve the event into something other barns and club members can join.



Jennifer Bergantino, Claudia Burnham, and Andrea Smith took part in a “fire and noise clinic” and were certified in Basic Mounted Police Training.



Leah Greenberger recently acquired the stallion Blær from Sand Meadow (US2008103875) from Lisi Ohm at Vindaldalur Icelandics in Nova Scotia. Blær is 12 years old and evaluated first prize for conformation and second prize, as a four-gaiter, for ridden abilities. Blær is sired by the famous Stígandi frá Leysingjastöðum II and has his wonderful calm personality. He has many lovely offspring and will be available to registered mares this spring.

New member Connie Campanella and her husband recently purchased a home in East Stroudsburg, PA and found a home close by for Léttlindur, their 13-year-old chestnut pinto. A self-described “old novice,” Connie began riding at the age of 61 and, like many of us, after research and looking for something both fun and reliable, she found the Icelandic horse. She was drawn to the breed for its size, healthfulness, and disposition. Léttlindur was imported from Iceland to Iowa. He’s spirited, with good manners, but does have allergies, which Connie has learned to control. Connie recently subscribed to the “Horse Tricks Academy” and has enjoyed teaching Léttlindur, who is especially enamored of the pedestal. Says Connie, “I think standing up on it makes him feel like a big horse!” Connie’s goals for riding are to “enjoy the outdoors in the company of a beautiful animal and good friends!” Pretty much sums it up for all of us.

## SIRIUS

by Jyl Snyder

In spite of the cancellation of several favorite activities due to Covid-19, including Equine Affaire and many of our planned trail rides, we saw a lot of club member activity here in Ohio and Kentucky. In June, we sponsored a weekend camp out at Caesar’s Creek State Park near Waynesville, OH. Eight riders attended, and the weather cooperated for the entire weekend. In August, we had our yearly Sirius riding clinic at Léttleiki Icelandics in Shelbyville, KY. Seven riders and four auditors participated in the dressage clinic this year. Again, we had glorious weather, which always enhances the experience.

Sirius members were not letting grass grow under their feet amid the Covid



Jyl Snyder and Poppy practicing “pulling brush” for an upcoming farm trail clearing project.

restrictions. We ride our horses! Our Sea2Shining Sea participants—Sherry and Ron Hoover, Colleen McCafferty, Constance Wilmoth, Jane Coleman, and Kerstin Lundgren—logged numerous riding hours, while Kathy Rekers was the July S2SS rider of the month. Frances Rospotynski took part in a two-day intensive trail clinic, and Shellie Greyhavens prepared for and rode in several sanctioned obstacle course challenges. Numerous members rode locally on trails and others camped at parks in Ohio, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and as far as Arkansas. Several members took lessons to improve their riding and participated in events at our Sirius affiliate, Léttleiki Icelandics in Shelbyville, KY.

Our folks took advantage of many of the long-distance learning programs that were newly available for our Icelandic horses, proving that a pandemic doesn’t grind all riding activities to a halt. In fact, there are now a lot more Icelandic horse-gear distance learning programs and virtual showing opportunities in which everyone can participate from any part of the country. For example, Jane Coleman and Sherry Hoover took online courses to improve their riding; both riders completed Sirius member Carrie Brandt’s Gæðinga Dressage online course (see the article in Issue Three 2020 of the Quarterly). Carrie Brandt, Lori Cretney, Lisa Davis, Paetra Henningar, and Carly Conley participated in the USIHC



Shellie Greyhavens riding Bjarmi from Cytraas on the obstacle course in the Equine Trail Sports Challenge in Pataskala, OH.

Virtual Fall Show. Carrie, Lori, and Lisa also competed with their Icelandic horses in the International Liberty Horse Association’s online competition in October.

Sirius is looking forward to 2021 for even more riding events. We had plans for a booth at the Columbus Ohio Equine Affaire in March 2021, but that event has become virtual so we’ll wait until 2022. We still have nine trail rides planned throughout Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania and possibly Indiana for the year, and are recruiting members for one or two 2021 Sirius Sea2Shining Sea teams. We are also looking forward to sponsoring another riding clinic.



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## TOPPUR

by Cindy Niebuhr

The conclusion of our year was full of events both good and bad, and Toppur members seemed to experience it all. First, we would like to give our condolences to those Toppur and Icelandic family members who suffered losses due to this terrible virus. We are resilient people and always seem to lend a helping hand or give support when and where needed. With that said, we do have good news!

Fall and winter offered us several riding opportunities here in Iowa. Toppur proudly congratulates our participants and winners of the two USIHC Virtual Shows. We would also like to acknowledge our members who have participated in other events that promote the versatility and talent of our horses. These activities keep us driven to perfect and learn more about our beloved horses.

Harmony Icelandics provided Toppur members with unique opportunities in October. Virginia Lauridsen gave a clinic on the basics of showing, followed by a fabulous lunch and a beautiful trail ride through the woods. Club members were also allowed to video themselves on the Harmony track for personal or Virtual Show use. Along with Toppur members Cindy Niebuhr and Roxanne and Kirby Antisdal, Virginia put together a short video highlighting our horses' culture and talents for the Iowa Horse Council's Virtual Parade of Breeds as well. Wouldn't you know it, we won!

The new year will bring many challenges, but we are energized and are developing a calendar of events. In February we are sending representatives to the FEIF delegates meeting and plan to hold our first Toppur gathering. March and April are looking



promising for exhibitions at horse fairs. Toppur's new club decorations are exciting and educational, so we are anxious for their debut!

Summer will bring our first show since the pandemic began, so save the dates of June 5-6 and join us in Truro, IA if you can! We're also in the planning stages for some fabulous guest speakers and informative hands-on clinics. Please see our website ([www.toppur.org](http://www.toppur.org)) for information. Until then, live well, take care, and do good.

Toppur's video, featuring Virginia Lauridsen and Gosi frá Lambastöðum, took first place in the Iowa Horse Council's Parade of Breeds competition. Below left, Toppur members after an October trail ride in Truro, IA. Right, Cindy Niebuhr on Baron from Creekside Farm wearing her "thinking cap" at a dressage clinic in September.





# FOCUS ON BREEDING 2

by Virginia Lauridsen

As spring approaches, breeders await the arrival of new foals, begin to prepare for upcoming breeding assessments, and plan future breedings. This article, based on the work of the USIHC Breeding Committee, will discuss the care of the mare and foal, the breeding events we have planned for 2021, and the latest information about the DMRT3 gene.

## THE BIRTH OF A FOAL

Having an accurate record of the date of your mare's insemination is essential for determining her likely foaling date. The gestation period for horses is 340 days, but it is not unusual for a mare to give birth up to two weeks early or a month late. Foals born before 320 days rarely survive, despite our best efforts.

During the last trimester of pregnancy, you should carefully observe your mare and give special attention to her nutrition. Nutrients, vitamins, and minerals are crucial at this time. It is also important to monitor your vaccination schedule to prevent diseases such as Equine Herpes II and abortion-causing diseases. Working closely with your veterinarian will help you avert potential problems.

Generally, foaling in Icelandic horses is uneventful and quick, but there are numerous problems that can be potentially serious or fatal. During the final month of your mare's pregnancy, you should watch for these signs of impending birth: udder development (as early as one month before birth); nipple eversion (one to three weeks before foaling); tail head relaxation (up to two weeks before foaling); wax on the nipples (zero to three days before foaling); pelvic relaxation (usually starts 12 hours before foaling); and signs of restlessness, such as swishing the tail, pawing, curling the lip, and frequent urination or defecation.

There are three stages of parturition in the horse:

Stage One can be difficult to determine. The cervix is opening, and the foal is positioning itself for birth. Mares will instinctively look for a quiet, safe place to deliver their foal, and it is common for foaling to occur in the early hours of the



On this spread, we see two full siblings, a filly and colt sired by Álfadans frá Ingólfshvóli on Glódis von Hof Osterkamp: Gígja from Tolthaven (US2018205388) and Ljúfur from Tolthaven (US2017105277). Photos by breeder Susy Oliver.

morning when there is less activity at the barn or in the pasture.

Stage Two begins when the mare's water breaks and the foal begins to move through the pelvic canal. This stage can be very violent and should occur in about 20 minutes. If it lasts over 30 minutes, there is trouble. The foal should emerge front feet first, with its nose between its legs. Its hooves should be facing the ground, with the top of its head and its back toward the mare's back. As soon as the foal is born, you should arrange for your vet to come examine it (within the next 24 hours).

Stage Three is the passing of the placenta, or afterbirth. This should occur within a couple of hours of the birth of the foal, and it is important that the entire placenta has been passed. You should

collect the placenta and set it aside for the vet to examine when they come to see the foal. The placenta is a mirror image of the uterus. Examining it for scars or cysts, the entrance of the fallopian tubes, where the fetus was implanted, whether the foal was in position when the birth began, and any evidence of infection, your vet gains critical information about any distress the foal might be in, even if it appears to be healthy.

The foal will generally stand within the hour and nurse within two hours. It is important that the foal consume the nutrients from the mare's colostrum (the first milk), which is only possible during the first 24 hours and more so during the first 12 hours. The newborn foal will urinate within six to 10 hours and pass meconium (the first feces) within 12 hours.



## RAISING A FOAL

In Iceland, foals are born outside in the spring or early summer among a herd of pregnant mares, and they stay with that same herd of mares and foals all summer. They play with the other foals and are taught manners and the “rules of the herd” both by their mother and by the other mares. They have minimal contact with humans.

After weaning, the foals leave the mare herd and are moved to a new herd environment, perhaps with yearlings. When the youngsters become stronger, they will likely be turned out in a larger herd, often spending the summer in the mountains. Running free in rough terrain develops strong legs and feet and generally robust health. The animals learn to respect the herd hierarchy at each juncture.

This way of raising a foal is difficult to replicate in the U.S., where we frequently house our foals with only their mother or in a small group, and interact with them from the very first day. We also regularly change their groupings, which

prevents foals from benefiting from a “herd dynamic.” This dynamic develops when a large herd of horses is together for an extended period of time, usually eight to 10 months. Without a consistent herd, the youngster is not taught to respect others and can become “spoiled,” which then makes it more difficult to train in the future.

If possible, it is always best to allow your foal to grow up in a herd and be taught by the older horses. The next best option is for the foal to grow up with a “friend” and another mare. Note that putting the mare and foal together with a gelding should be avoided, as even a “nice” gelding may try to steal the foal. Definitely do not keep the foal with a stallion. Raising a foal in a stall should also be avoided. Still, unlike in Iceland, foals in the U.S. must be handled regularly, as we must vaccinate them—no diseases requiring vaccinations exist in Iceland.

## BREEDING EVENTS

One FEIF-sanctioned Icelandic horse breeding assessment is scheduled in the

U.S. for 2021. It will be held June 1-2 at Harmony Icelandics in Truro, Iowa. FEIF has not yet assigned us our judges, but these should be chosen in the near future (watch [www.icelandics.org](http://www.icelandics.org) for an announcement). For information about how to prepare for a breeding assessment and what goes on at these events, see the Breeding Focus in the last issue of the *Quarterly* (Issue Four 2020). As in the past, the 2021 breeding assessment will be paired with a breeding seminar, to be held at the same location on May 29-31.

In addition to the official assessments of stallions, broodmares, and their offspring, “mock” assessments and riding horse assessments will be offered during the June 1-2 event. The “mock” assessments will be conducted in the same manner as the official breeding horse assessments, but the scores will not be entered into the international Icelandic horse database, Worldfengur.

The riding horse assessments are geared toward owners who wish to take advantage of the breeding judges’ expertise. After they assess each horse’s conformation and gaits, the judges will then offer suggestions for training based on the horse’s genetic predisposition.

## THE GAITING GENE

To plan future breedings, you should educate yourself about the DMRT3 gene. This topic is a very important one for Icelandic horse breeders and one of great interest for equine geneticists. Often referred to as the “gaiting gene,” the DMRT3 gene determines a horse’s ability to move laterally.

The DMRT3 gene was first identified by the Swedish equine geneticist Lisa S. Andersson during her Ph.D. studies. The 2012 article she coauthored in *Nature* was a game changer for breeders of gaited horses. Since that time more research has been conducted and new studies are sure to continue in the future.

The most recent scientific publication about the DMRT3 and its effect on the movement of Icelandic horses was published in 2015 in *Livestock Science*. I was able to contact Gabriella Lindgren, who supervised Lisa Andersson during her graduate studies and co-authored both the *Nature* and *Livestock Science* papers. Gabriella was kind enough to discuss her research with me.







Each horse carries two alleles on their DMRT3 gene—one from their sire, and one from their dam. The “A” allele (referred to as the “gait keeper” gene), is a “mutant” gene and disrupts the coordination between the right and left sides of the body. This in turn makes it easier for the horse to perform lateral movements, which are necessary for tölt and pace. “The A-allele occurs at a very high frequency in gaited breeds,” the researchers write, “but is rare or absent in three gaited breeds.” The “C” allele (referred to as the “diagonal gene”) creates more suspension in diagonal gaits, such as trot and canter.

There are three possible allele combinations on the DMRT3 gene: AA, CA, and CC. Genetically, only AA horses are capable of performing the pace—but that does not mean every AA horse has a good flying pace. “The quality of pace is a traditional complex trait, determined by a combination of multiple genes and the environment,” the researchers note. Many “AA” horses are considered “4-gaited or 4.5 gaited,” as they are not trained in pace, or do not have the ability to perform the gait at sufficient speed. AA horses are considered “natural” tölters, but their gait can also become quite “pacey.”

CA and CC horses can be taught to tölt and may even develop a clearer-beated gait than AA horses, but the gait is not “natural” for them and will be more difficult to train. Some CA horses have even been observed to choose tölt when running free, but they cannot pace.

Among Icelandic horses, AA horses are generally given much higher scores for tölt and pace in breeding assessments, but CA and CC horses generally score higher for walk, trot, canter, and gallop. CC horses have had better success in dressage, show jumping, and eventing. Conformation and training undoubtedly also play a role in gait quality, and is a topic of current research.

Today, anyone can discover their horse’s DMRT3 genotype through a com-

From a foal to under saddle: Stjarni from Tolthaven (US2013104780), sired by Stigandi frá Leysingjastöðum II, as a day-old foal and in his first green-horse class, ridden by Susy Oliver. Photos by Susy Oliver and Maria Octavo.



From a foal to under saddle: Keli from Tolthaven (US2005102973), sired by Stirnir frá Efri-Pverá, as a young foal and on the track as a trained horse, ridden by breeder Susy Oliver. Photos by Susy Oliver and Nicki Pfau.

mercial test called SynchroGait®. The test is simple to order and uses a hair sample from the mane or tail. This is especially useful information for potential breeders.

“By crossing the right combinations, each mare owner can optimize the chances of obtaining offspring with the particular pattern of locomotion she or he prefers: four-gaited or five-gaited,” the researchers note. It can be very difficult to teach a CC horse to tölt, so “it would be a sound breeding strategy for breeders who wish to have horses with an easy tölt to avoid breeding homozygous CC [Icelandic] horses. This can be avoided by breeding extant homozygous CC horses only to AA horses and by avoiding breeding heterozygous CA horses to one another.”

The DMRT3 genotype is listed on WorldFengur in the top right-hand corner of a horse’s basic information page. If the horse has been DNA tested, the allele combination will show in a dark blue circle. It is often easy to predetermine a horse’s allele combination if you know the alleles of the parents. For instance, an AA sire and an AA dam can only produce AA offspring. If the genotype is predetermined, it will be shown on WorldFengur in a light gray circle.

## REFERENCES

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# TARGET TRAINING THE HERD

by Alys Culhane



I stood at the paddock gate, a big muck bucket full of hay in my hands. Raudhetta, Tyra, and Hrimfara stuck their heads over the entrance and lunged at the contents. I stepped back, placed the hay bucket on the ground, and put my hands on my hips. Raudhetta shoved her bulk to the left, into Tyra, who walked in a big circle, over to Hrimmi's right. Hrimmi, now in the middle, banged on the gate with her hoof.

"Back, back, back," I yelled. The three mares kept their eyes on the hay bucket. I grabbed the crop which I'd stuck into a nearby snowbank, opened the gate, and entered the pen. "Back, back, back," I repeated. The mares snaked around me and, with noses extended, yanked a hay flake out of the bucket. I dragged the container to the center of the enclosure, scattered the contents on the hardpacked snow, and stomped out of the pen.

I'd been annoyed for some time by their feeding-related pushiness, but I'd presumed the issue would resolve itself.

After all, the three mares had excellent ground manners when I interacted with them one on one. But I knew now that if I didn't do something about it, I might get hurt.

I conceded to Pete, my husband, that I had a problem and suggested we solve it by constructing separate eating areas. I envisioned ours as being similar to the one our friend Frank Sihler had built: a series of panel enclosures with individual units, one for each horse. But our set-up, which consists of an open area, three shelters, and several gates, wasn't conducive to individual feeding units, Pete noted, and I knew he was right.

My subsequent "ah ha" moment—or what Aristotle calls a click of recognition—was born of necessity. I would train the mares to stand at predesignated stations while I doled out the hay. Furthermore, my use of operant conditioning techniques—in this case, target training and clicker training—would complement my ongoing use of behavior-based training.

In the midst of target training, Raudi is still being pushy and crowding the gate, but Hrimmi waits patiently at her target.

Photo by Pete Praetorius.

## STAYING POSITIVE

The framework that animal behaviorists generally refer to as positive reinforcement came back to mind. Positive (in this instance) means to add something. A positive reinforcer is something added to the environment that strengthens the delivery of a desired response. It can take the form of a food reward, a pat, or verbal praise.

Negative reinforcement, the opposite, means to take something away. A negative reinforcer is something that results in the increased frequency of a desired response when it is removed. Think of it this way: You apply pressure to the horse's side. The horse sidles away from you, the source of the pressure, which is removed as soon as the horse responds. The horse's movement is thus a negative



reinforcer.

Animal behaviorists also talk about positive and negative punishment. Positive punishment is something added to the environment that decreases the frequency of a certain behavior. For example, an electric fence shocks a horse when he attempts to cross a set boundary. The horse learns that avoiding the shock and staying within the confines of the enclosed area are synonymous. In negative punishment, something is taken away from the environment, the presence of which decreases the frequency of a certain behavior. If, say, you separate two horses, the one will cease to bully the other. Removing the bullied horse reduces the frequency of the bullying behavior; thus, this behavior is said to be negatively punished.

I've been using positive reinforcement techniques for close to 20 years. But I've discovered that there's no getting away from the occasional use of negative reinforcement techniques, one of which is the application of pressure—such as the use of leg and rein pressure when riding, though I've continually attempted to minimize these. I've also avoided the use of both positive and negative punishment, for I've found their effects to be short lasting and to make animals fearful. Conversely, the near-exclusive use of positive reinforcement requires the use of one's imagination. To me, that makes it both more fun and more challenging.

## STUDYING UP

I've been pleased with my previous target training efforts, such as teaching a horse to trailer-load (which I wrote about in the last issue of the Quarterly). However, if I was serious about having all three horses remain at a distance while I laid out their hay, I knew I'd have to figure out the ins and outs of group training.

I began by rereading Shawna and Vinton Karrasch's *You Can Teach Your Horse to Do Anything*, Alexandra Kurland's *Clicker Training for Your Horse*, Ben Hart's *Clicker Training for Horses*, and Sharon Foley's *Getting to Yes*. These authors, as well as clicker trainers whose videos I found on YouTube, offer suggestions on how to individually target train a horse. None of them, however, write about or provide information on how to collectively train a herd of horses to back off at the gate.

I also came across videos on clicker training other animals, including chickens. In fact, previous to quarantine restrictions, a two-week chicken clicker training camp was held each year in Washington State. If it is offered again, I will certainly attend, for it appears that working with fowl better enables you to get the timing of your clicks right.

When I'd attended the annual Karen Pryor Clicker Training Expo in 2017, the keynote speaker was Ken Ramirez, director of the Shed Aquarium in Chicago. He spoke in glowing terms about using clicker training to work with African elephants. I was so impressed that I purchased his

compilation, *Animal Training: Successful Animal Management through Positive Reinforcement*. This hefty 580-page document came wrapped in plastic; unwrapping it, I discovered it primarily consisted of academic journal articles on training marine mammals. I'd set it aside, thinking marine mammals and horses were worlds apart. Now, however, I resumed reading it after determining there was an inherent association. If, say, six dolphins could be trained to leap through multiple hoops, then three horses could be trained to stand quietly in a designated location.

The lengthy Alaskan winter nights are conducive to both serious studying and sleeping. I'd eat dinner, read a few pages of the Ramirez text, and doze off. I finally devised a workable study strategy, alternating between Ramirez and Karen Pryor. Pryor is the grande dame of positive reinforcement training. She was, in the 1960s, a forerunner in the marine mammal field. Pryor drew upon key concepts espoused by the behaviorist B.F. Skinner. He asserted that behavior that is followed by pleasant consequences is more likely to be repeated, while behavior followed by unpleasant consequences is less likely to be repeated. Pryor wrote numerous articles and books based on this premise, the most well-known being *Don't Shoot the Dog: The New Art of Teaching and Training*, *Searching the Animal Mind: Clicker Training and What It Teaches All Animals*, *Lads Before the Wind*, and *On Behavior*. The primary difference between Ramirez's and Pryor's books is that



After eight weeks of target training, Raudi, Tyra, and Hrimmi all stand quietly at their stations waiting for their hay.



Ramirez's audience is professional marine mammal trainers, while Pryor's audience is people (like me) who work privately, at home, with a handful of dogs and horses.

One misgiving I have about all the above information sources is that they make it seem as though clicker and target training are easy. They fail to acknowledge that trial and error learning is a time-consuming, non-linear process. However, my internalizing key concepts proved to be less confusing to the horses than any attempt to memorize and recall them verbatim when out in the field. For example, a "Fixed Schedule of Reinforcement" is defined in the Ramirez book as "a form of partial reinforcement in which a 'rule' or behavior is rewarded only after a specific period of time has elapsed since the last rewarded use, the period of time being constant." In other words, the reinforcer is given out in timed intervals. Another example: A "Fixed Ratio Schedule" is defined as "a schedule of reinforcement in which the organism is reinforced after a set of noncorrect reinforced correct responses." In other words, the reinforcer is given out periodically. In my words: A reliance upon one or the other schedules keeps the horse guessing.

### **ONE ON ONE**

Here is how individual target training generally works: The horse is shown a target stick, the expectation being that he will touch it with his nose. The behavior is then shaped in a step-by-step fashion. For example: The horse first touches the stick, then touches the target on the end of the stick. Each shape or behavior is "marked," or duly noted by the trainer at the moment it occurs, with an audible sound. Most horse owners use a clicker, a small hand-held device. The click sound means, Yes, you are on the right track. A reinforcer, often a food reward, is provided when the horse elicits the desired behavior.

After clicker training my horses to touch the target stick, I next showed them a supplement bucket lid. They were reinforced for touching this target, which I either held in my hand or placed on the ground. I then "faded" out the target stick and gradually increased the amount of what I called "touch time" before reinforcing the desired behavior. Lastly, I added a verbal cue: I used the word "touch" when using the stick, and "target" when using the bucket lid. I discovered that behaviorists

were right: Adding the verbal cue after the requisite behavior has been learned serves as a useful directive.

### **ALL TOGETHER**

It took me two months to group target train Raudi, Hrimmi, and Tyra—seven weeks longer than I had predicted.

I began the process by engaging in what positive reinforcement trainers call an "enrichment activity." I tossed four three-gallon plastic cans filled with hay pellets over the fence. The mares pushed the containers around their enclosure and dislodged the treats. Their single-minded intensity of focus brought to mind the adage "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas," for, of course, onlookers were mystified. While they were busy, I opened the gate and spread their hay on the snow.

My short-term solution distracted the mares. But more importantly, it resulted in a dopamine release. Dopamine is a feel-good drug, or more specifically a neurohormone that's released by the hypothalamus gland. It's secreted in anticipation of getting what one desires.

I began group target training in earnest by tossing three bright-yellow feed supplement lids out into the yard. The use of these particular lids wasn't a matter of happenstance: Horses see yellow and blue the best, but they don't (for example) recognize red. I marked their behavior with the clicker as the mares individually touched a target, then reinforced that behavior with hay pellets. It was tricky to mark multiple animals' behavior. To alleviate confusion, I had to make sure my timing coincided with each nose touch. I had to move fast, in order to make sure that each mare was recognized as having touched her target and was then rewarded for it.

I next placed the three targets several yards apart, at the base of the fence-line. There were, as yet, no set boundaries; hence, the milling around continued. It was then that I had another "ah ha" moment. Securing the targets to the fence would earmark the areas as three individual stations. I drilled holes in three bucket lids, shoved baling twine through the holes, and fastened the twine loops to the fence with carabiners.

The mares moseyed on over to the stations and, upon touching the fence targets, were clicked and rewarded. They soon realized that they'd be reinforced

when they stood quietly at their own station. I simplified this task by taking boundary-related concerns into account. Raudi's site was on the far left, Tyra's was in the middle, and Hrimmi's was on the far right, with no exceptions. As I'd hoped, they monitored one another's behavior. When, for example, Tyra ventured into Raudi's space, Raudi chased her off.

And I, when necessary, intervened by replacing an unacceptable behavior with an acceptable one. When, for example, Tyra came over and mugged me, I made her back up in the direction of her target, do a turn on the forehand, and stand quietly for several minutes. I then marked and reinforced this very welcome behavior.

I varied the amount of time in which the horses were required to stand in place. This kept them guessing as to when their behavior would be marked and reinforced. Each time, the three horses remained in their respective areas.

### **THEY GOT IT!**

The day finally came when the three horses "got it." I, on the far side of the gate, said "target." The mares ambled over to their respective targets and stood quietly. I opened the gate and scattered the contents of the hay bucket on the snow. I returned to the gate, put the bucket on the far side of the enclosure, closed the gate, walked to the middle of the pen, marked their behavior, then reinforced it. I then exited the enclosure. The horses consumed the pellets that I had tossed on the ground, then meandered over to their hay buffet. I, of course, made a big deal about the fact that they had done so well.

I was pleased, for the implementation of group targeting eliminated the likelihood of any future feeding-related rows. An important realization followed on the heels of this success: Appearing with the hay bucket in hand, I had created a situation that was not of their making or to their liking. They merely wanted food. They had no idea why I repeatedly shouted at them, then whooshed them away with a crop. Now that we had a set routine, we were all far more relaxed at the onset of feeding time. This, of course, further endeared me to my three red-headed mares.



# COHERENT HORSEMANSHIP

book review by E. Rachel Hochman

## COHERENT HORSEMANSHIP

*Combining the Quantum and the Classical*



by  
Adrienne N. Neary

A mutual friend introduced me to Adrienne Neary because she felt our work and our interests were aligned. Jane, our connection, is not an equestrian, but she knew Adrienne and I approach our interactions with our horses and our clients from an ethic of connected relationship. However, Adrienne has almost three decades of horse experience, while I have three years.

Adrienne studied dressage with H.L.M. van Schaik, while I had horseback riding lessons once a week and at Girl Scout camp to age 12. Since I got my Icelandic horses three years ago, I've taken perhaps 20 lessons and a few clinics. As Adrienne encourages, I'd been "letting [my] inner wisdom be my guide."

Recently, though, I admitted to a friend, "I feel like I need a Ph.D. to own horses." I decided it was time to acquire more knowledge to guide my inner wisdom. But where to begin? There are so many areas from which to choose: rider biomechanics, horse biomechanics, nutrition, tack, saddle fit, bit choice, farriers, gait training, etc.

Meeting Adrienne and learning of her new book, *Coherent Horsemanship: Combining the Quantum and the Classical*, was timely! The opportunity to review a book by an experienced dressage rider, certified Reiki practitioner, and neighbor (Adrienne lives about 45 minutes from me) motivated me to launch into further study.

### CREATE HARMONY

In *Coherent Horsemanship*, Adrienne provides practical instructions that combine basic equine and human energy work with fundamental classical dressage exercises useful for riders in any discipline. Read-

ers can use these exercises and the Focus Concepts with their equine partners to create harmony through biomechanics, breathing, and physical and psychological conditioning.

Adrienne's words resonated with me immediately. In her first chapter, she reminds the reader that "placing greater emphasis on social-emotional stability over competition and comparison [gives] horses and humans the time they need to deal with situational challenges and emotional triggers." For me, becoming an equestrian has been about being with my horses in the landscape. I don't desire to show my horses—though I understand why people do compete, and I love to watch videos of equestrian events.

In my experience, when I am out-of-doors with my horses we can truly express ourselves in the moment. We choose to be with one another and to be one with nature. Adrienne calls this feeling "coherence." She writes, "Coherence is an exceptionally efficient physiological state. The nervous, cardiovascular, hormonal, and immune systems all work harmoniously. It is the highest level of function for our bodies, and can be thought of as an optimal performance level."

### BEING OR THING?

When do you experience coherence?

Adrienne asks us to see our horses as thoughtful, sensitive beings who can sense our energy and emotions, have memories, feel pain, and may choose to partner with us.

"Horses bred for sport, competition, racing, or any other purpose are automatically things, not beings," she warns. When we see other beings (or ourselves) as things or objects, we might treat them as vehicles for our own self-interest, using them to fulfill some need of our own. Or we might approach them as obstacles to meeting our needs, provoking our frustration, anger, and misunderstanding.

By contrast, when we accept our equine partners as the sensitive beings they are, we become aware of the subtle signals they are sending us. We drop our expectations and ask, What kind of invitation am I sending my horse? What kind of invitation is he sending me?

In *Coherent Horsemanship*, Adrienne's thought-provoking exercises increase our awareness of what our horses might be experiencing in the moment, what they are asking from us, and how we might better respond to their responses.

"Imagine your intentions [are] being received without distortion," she writes, "and your horse [is] trusting you more deeply than ever before." That is coherence.

### IN THE MOMENT

Have you had moments when you noticed your horse was energetically or physically unbalanced? Perhaps you noticed an unusual disconnect between your aids and the response, or a change in movement patterns? Adrienne offers us clearly described exercises and Focus Concepts, with deftly drawn illustrations that take us back to basics. These concepts ground us, so we can sense these moments and invite the healthiest energetic and biomechanical responses from our horses and ourselves.

Through coherence, we can understand why our horse is responding "yes," and why he is countering with "no." We create active collaboration in the moment, rather than displaying our power through control. The horse's essential expertise is allowed to blossom forth, as he shows us what his body and mind are capable of. As we let go of timelines and expectations, we can focus on "entrainment" rather than "training."

Through energy work and flatwork, Adrienne helps us become more aware of how we might offer connection and harmony to our equine partner, and how to amplify those moments when they occur. Jane, our mutual friend, was right to connect us. She recognized that relationships, understanding, and connection are of primary importance to both Adrienne and me. I'm excited to amplify my attunement with my Icelandic horses using the lessons Adrienne shares in *Coherent Horsemanship*.

### CONTACT

*Coherent Horsemanship* (\$16.99) can be purchased directly from <https://www.BeechTreeArts.com>. Contact at Beech Tree Arts, New London, NH; [adrienne@beechtreearts.com](mailto:adrienne@beechtreearts.com); 603-848-8459.



# RIDERS OF A CERTAIN AGE

by Kristin Moorhead

When I meet with Icelandic horse friends to go on trail rides, I'm often the youngest rider in the group—and I'm no spring chicken. I'm a woman of a certain age myself, but almost all of my Icelandic friends are older. This got me wondering about what makes this breed so popular among mature riders. So I did some asking around, and this is what I learned.

The friends with whom I ride most often are Nancy and Oran Clemmensen, who are 73 and 79, respectively. Nancy first learned of Icelandics when she visited my farm in Northfield, Minnesota, about 12 years ago. At that time Nancy was doing foster care, and she thought that the kind, gentle demeanor of the Icelandic horse would make it a great therapy horse for her foster kids. Due to the Icelandics' smaller stature, the kids weren't afraid of the horses. They also got to mother the horses when one of Nancy's mares produced a foal.

## SMALL & SMOOTH

Nancy soon realized that riding would be a great retirement activity for her and Oran. They liked the small size and the smooth gaits of the Icelandics. Nancy attended a clinic I hosted in 2012. At that time, she was a very tentative and unsure rider—not anymore! Now Nancy and Oran can outride me any day of the week. The two ride two to five hours a day in summer. They find that riding keeps them connected, and they do things that others their age don't get to do. The couple feels that the horses keep them young and keep their muscles active and strong. At times Nancy has said, "I could hardly walk, but I felt better after riding."

Nancy has owned several Icelandic horses over the years. She knows that you have to find the horse that matches your riding style. "If you find one that matches your personality, you've got gold for your golden years."

## SAFE & BEAUTIFUL

Sandie Mortenson Weaver is another rider who hasn't let age slow her down. Sandie lives in Southern California and will be 70 soon. Sandie first encountered Icelandic horses when her daughter went to a 4-H Night of the Horse in 1999. They were so drawn to the Icelandics that she and her



With the right horse, your Golden Years are truly golden. Nancy Clemmensen on Draumur riding the creek on their farm in September. Photo by Kristin Moorhead.

daughter soon started going to an Icelandic horse farm to ride together every three weeks.

Sandie learned from the breeder there that the Icelandic horse has a reduced flight response. Sandie said, "With other breeds everyone was pleased if no one got hurt at the end of a trail ride. When we rode Icelandics, there was no discussion of this, for it was expected that we would be safe."

Some luck and fate came into play when Sandie got her own Icelandic horse. Sandie and her husband were chaperones for her daughter's soccer team trip to Sweden, and they just happened to have a three-day layover in Iceland. While in Iceland they went on a riding trek, and that experience convinced them to purchase a horse for their daughter. Sandie secretly arranged to buy a second horse for herself. Only after the horse arrived in California and her husband said, "that is the most beautiful horse that I've ever seen," did Sandie break it to him that it was indeed her horse.

Sandie was a timid rider at first, but she quickly improved. Since the first day she saw them, her love of Icelandic horses has never wavered. She still has the horses they

imported from Iceland, which are now ages 33 and 28, as well as a third Icelandic, who is 26. They still ride the two "younger" horses.

## LIKE FERRARIS

After talking to friends who continue to ride as they age, I decided to interview some of the importers and breeders of Icelandic horses to find out what they think attracts older riders to the breed.

One thing that both Nancy and Sandie did when initially getting into Icelandics was to take lessons to learn how to correctly ride an Icelandic horse. Learning about Icelandics and taking lessons is key, according to Andrea Brodie, a longtime Icelandic breeder. Andrea, originally from Germany, has been raising Icelandics in Colorado since 2005 (see [www.coloradoicelandics.com](http://www.coloradoicelandics.com) or Lough Arrow Icelandics on Facebook). Since then, she has noticed an increase in the number of older riders, mainly women, in the U.S. Icelandic market.

One of Andrea's main concerns is that there is a misconception that Icelandics are large ponies that anyone can ride. Women who suddenly have the time and the money to buy a horse after not having ridden for 30



years are sometimes disappointed. Andrea adds, “I will not sell to beginners. People think Icelandics are just sweet, calm horses, they are actually Ferraris.”

Andrea feels that if the horse is happy, then the rider will be happy. A horse needs to be allowed to run once in a while. Horse and rider can have fun together going up and down hills, into rivers, over rough terrain. Since Icelandic horses don’t spook easily they can be an awesome trail partner, but Andrea suggests, “If you want a dead-head horse that only walks, look for another breed.”

## BRAVE

Another breeder/importer with a wealth of knowledge of Icelandics is Steve Barber. Steve and his wife Andrea own Sand Meadow Farm in New York State (see [www.sandmeadow.com](http://www.sandmeadow.com) or Sand Meadow Farm on Facebook). The Barbers have been importing horses from Iceland since 1997 and usually import about 18 horses per year. Steve has also seen an uptick in interest in Icelandics among mature riders.

Like Andrea Brodie, Steve also suggests taking lessons prior to purchase. He stresses safety: He won’t allow someone to buy a horse that isn’t safe for them. He and Andrea try a consultative approach. “We get to know the buyer. What are their goals? What is a typical ride for them?” Steve says, “We know our horses and we try to match the horse with the rider.”

Some of the traits that older riders are looking for is a calm horse. Buyers also like the fact that Icelandics are shorter horses

that they can easily mount. And, of course, everyone appreciates a smooth ride. Older riders tend to look for horses primarily for trail riding. Mature riders are looking for their last horse, so it makes sense to take the time to find a good fit.

“Everyone thinks that a slow horse is a good trail horse,” Steve says. “This couldn’t be further from the truth. A well-trained, brave horse is a better trail horse.”

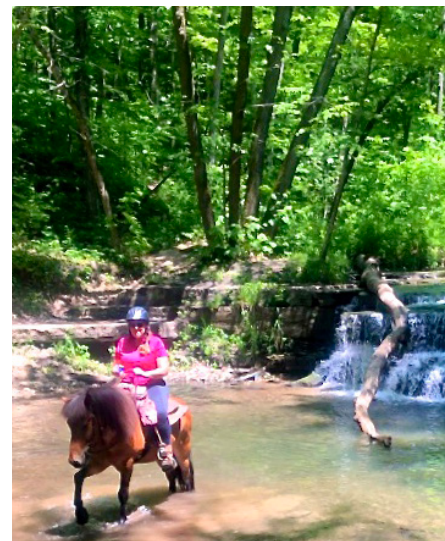
Older riders also are concerned with their horses outliving them or outliving their ability to care for the horse, Steve notes. This is indeed something to take into consideration when choosing an Icelandic, since these horses can live well into their 30s.

## NERVES OF STEEL

A third breeder/importer that I interviewed for this article is Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir. Sigrún is originally from Iceland. She started importing horses to the U.S. in 1995. She got away from horses for a while to attend law school, but soon returned to her passion and now runs an Icelandic horse farm in Vermont (see Solheimar Farm on Facebook).

In 2020, Sigrún imported 44 horses. When we spoke, early in 2021, she had recently returned from Iceland where, after quarantining, she was able to purchase 14 more horses. All were sold prior to being shipped to the U.S.

Obviously, the tried-and-true advice of trying out many horses prior to purchasing one doesn’t work when you are buying a horse sight unseen, as Sigrún’s clients do. Sigrún uses “a recipe of sorts to find the



Kristin Moorhead rides Ragnar near Caron Falls in June. Photo by Nancy Clemmensen.

right horses.” She says she has a list of about 100 character traits that she looks for in the horses she chooses to import to the U.S.: The most important is “nerves of steel.”

About 90% of the horses Sigrún imports go to mature riders. Sigrún thinks that the qualities that make Icelandics appealing to older riders are their smoothness, of course, plus the fact that they are sure-footed and level-headed. In addition, Icelandic horses tend to be easy keepers and are generally healthy. Older riders also look for horses that are not too forward-going.

“This is not Iceland. Americans want a different Icelandic horse than the people in Iceland want. I find the horses that Americans want,” Sigrún explains.

## PERFECT

I was lucky. My “for-life horse,” Ragnar, was born on my own farm. I wasn’t that old when I got into Icelandics, but as I’ve aged and become less agile I’ve come to appreciate their calm, smooth ride. Every once in a while, I ride a friend’s big breed horse. I usually feel like I’m being launched into outer space when they break into a trot.

My gelding isn’t perfect, but he’s perfect for me. My horses are like pets—a friend calls them “my big dogs.” Hopefully, I can be an active rider for many years to come, like Nancy, Oran, and Sandie. By the way, since I mentioned everyone else’s age, I guess I should confess I’m 55. Just like the great role models in the Icelandic world, I plan to keep tölting down the trails for some time to come.



Left to right, Nancy Clemmensen (age 73) rides Draumur from Windy Hills, Kristin Moorhead (55) rides Ragnar from JB, and Oran Clemmensen (79) rides Pytur from Falk. Photo by Laura Geissler.



# GET IN SHAPE!

by Florie Miller  
illustration by Nancy Wines-Dewan



Lately I've been giving some thought to my own health and fitness. The forties are not always kind to the waist line and I can definitely notice some softening of my muscles. As horse people, we always keep a keen eye on our horses' weight, condition, and overall well being. Why not extend that to ourselves?

Because we live a rather active lifestyle just by being horse people, it's easy to think that we don't need to work on fitness. Sure riding, mucking, and moving those hay bales are a great start. But when is the last time you really sweated or were able to touch your toes?

I reached out to some professional trainers to see what they do to stay in shape. Milena Frische, head trainer at Rappenhof Breuna in Germany, likes to run. She says, "Running not only gives me the benefit of a good physical and mental shape, it also gives me more endurance, strength, and concentration while working with horses."

Linda Rún Pétursdóttir, Knights of Iceland demo rider and trainer at Hestaland in Iceland, likes to work out in the gym. She says, "The more you work on your body strength, the more you become aware of your own body and the easier it

is to have full control of your body, which directly translates into having a better seat in the saddle."

Nicole Kempf, one of Germany's most successful trainers and competition riders, likes to dance salsa. Dancing, she says, improves her stamina, suppleness, and, most of all, her feel for rhythm.

As riders it is important to be in good physical shape for the following reasons: Obviously, the first reason is weight. The heavier we are, the more weight our horses have to lug around. Yes, they are sturdy beasts, but we owe it to them to make their job as easy as we can.



Weight is only one factor, however; balance is another one. When you get in shape your balance gets better too, because of improved muscle tone. Good balance is essential to being a good rider.

The last factor is suppleness. We cannot expect our horses to be supple if we as riders are not supple ourselves. A stiff rider will always result in a stiff horse.

In this article, I'm going to go over some tips to get you motivated about getting—and staying—in shape, for your own and your horses' sake.

## **YOUTUBE YOGA**

I decided to start my own journey toward a healthier body by doing some yoga. We live in a wonderful time of unlimited resources, thanks to the internet, so it didn't take me long before I found "Yoga with Adriene" on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/user/yogawithadriene>).

Adriene is a pleasant, down-to-earth woman who offers several short and easy yoga sessions on her YouTube channel. It's super easy to fit one into your day—I really like her morning wake-up sessions. Yoga is great for many reasons. Stretching and strengthening your body are the obvious ones, but I also hugely benefited from better breathing technique and more overall calmness and focus. These are skills that immediately transfer to your riding.

## **A PERSONAL TRAINER**

Getting a personal trainer is something that seems to be reserved for the rich and famous, but you would be surprised to find out how accessible it is! Just get in touch with a local recreation center or gym and get some names and phone numbers. Call until you find somebody that you click with. These people are professionals. They are all required to be certified, and will be able to work with you on your level.

A professional trainer will motivate you in a way you can never do on your own. In these Covid times, you might not want to go into the actual rec center or gym, but instead meet outside, where you will get the added bonus of getting some fresh air. Hiring a personal trainer doesn't have to be a major expense, either. I have found that these are very active people who are always interested in trying new things themselves, so maybe you can trade a workout session for a ride

on a horse and that way keep your costs down.

Or, instead of a real life personal trainer, you can find one on YouTube. I found a British lady named Rebecca Louise ([https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCi0AqmA\\_3DGPFcu5qY0LLSg](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCi0AqmA_3DGPFcu5qY0LLSg)). I have to admit it took me a second to get used to her super-positive attitude—maybe a little over the top for some of us—but her workouts are really good. They are short, about 15 minutes long, and each one focuses on a certain part of your body, such as arms, abs, or legs. Most of the exercises come with moderation; that way you can make them harder or easier. So you can do just one workout (no excuses! It's only 15 minutes!) or you can do several in a row. The advantages of exercising at home are that you don't have to schedule it, you can do it whenever you want, and you don't have to worry about what to wear.

## **FITNESS FOR RIDERS**

Another trainer I found online is Bergrún Ingólfssdóttir. She is a graduate of the famous equestrian program at Hólar University College in Iceland and a personal fitness coach. You can find her videos by going to the Hrimnir website, then clicking on Community and Trainers (or <https://www.hrimnir.shop/community/trainers/>).

There you will find 6 short videos (each 5-10 minutes long): 1) The Importance of Rider Fitness, 2) Seat Exercises—Corrections, 3) Seat Exercises—Stability, 4) Lower Body Exercises for Riders, 5) Upper Body Exercises for Riders, and 6) Core Exercises for Riders.

Bergrún is very calm and explains the exercises very clearly. A couple of her videos have beautiful Icelandic horses in them, which make them easy to watch! There is also a contact form if you want to ask Bergrún more specific questions.

The Hrimnir Community overall is a really good resource for Icelandic horse riders, with lots of useful (and free) videos on things like improving focus, the timing of the aids, how to control the horse's topline, groundwork, transitions, and many more. The only downside is that you are now on the Hrimnir website and might be more inclined to shop for that new saddle you really want instead of working out!

## **WALKING 2.0**

Another thing that I've found very helpful is walking. Why? Because it's something we do all the time anyway! Even when we are not motivated to work out or do any "exercise," we still walk—and if we're focused on fitness, we can make all that walking count. I call this walking 2.0.

For example, when you go out for your morning walk with your dog, instead of just walking throw in some extras. What would you ask your horse to do? How about speed changes? So run up that little hill or down the stairs. Get your heart rate up! Do some squats while your dog is doing his business, and throw in a few lunges on the way back.

At the grocery store, try to park as far away as possible and do some arm lifts with those grocery bags. You will be surprised how many exercises you can throw in.

At the barn, on your way to grab your saddle do some overhead tricep dips and leg lifts. Taking your horse back to the paddock? Great time to do some lunges.

Even inside your house you can keep active. On your way to grab a beverage from the fridge? How about some arm rotations!

## **ENJOY IT!**

Of course, exercising is only one part of the puzzle of keeping ourselves in shape. Diet is just as important (what beverage did you just grab?) and here I found Noom.com to be a good resource to learn more about my eating habits and work toward eating better.

But the most important thing is to keep it fun. You will not be able to stay motivated if you are too hard on yourself. As our friend and riding instructor Guðmar Pétursson says, "You are never going to be perfect, so you might as well enjoy the journey."



# SOMETHING DIFFERENT by Lisa McKeen



**W**hat are (or were) your assumptions about Icelandic horses? Are they only for pleasure riding, only for sport competition, only for trekking in Iceland? Most of us in the Icelandic horse world have long lost our assumptions about the abilities of this breed, as the horses we have met and love continue to show us what they can, and like to, do—and sometimes it’s something completely different than you’d expect!

In this article, some of us have decided to share with you our and our horses’ favorite things to do.

## **WORKING COWS**

Meet Pierre Lessard from Carmel Valley, California. The Icelandic horse he rides in the photos is Andvari from Red Feather, a gelding bred in Washington State by Linda Templeton of Red Feather Icelandics. Pierre has another Icelandic horse

Pierre Lessard teaches Andvari from Red Feather to work with cows at the Carmel Valley Trail and Saddle club in Carmel Valley, CA. Photos by Nina Hahn.

(not pictured here), a 23-year-old gelding named Fengari who was rescued by Linda a long time ago, and a 17-year-old Azteca gelding called Moose, ridden in one of the photos by Pierre’s friend Ray Berta.

Ray is a well-known horse trainer and rancher who conducts cattle-working clinics on a regular basis at the Carmel Valley Trail and Saddle Club, as well as giving horsemanship clinics and private lessons. In addition to organizing Ray’s cattle clinics, the Carmel Club offers its members a weekly Cattle Night. Every Monday night, alternating between novice and advanced riders, Club members have the opportunity to work with a herd of cattle at the club. For the novices, the work consists mostly in driving, sorting, and penning cows, individually or in groups (teams) of riders; for the advanced riders, the work also includes roping and cutting.

“On his first introduction to cows,” Pierre says, “Andvari was acting like a pro. He didn’t show any fear. On the contrary, he was very curious and walked right into the middle of the herd, touching nose to nose or nose to tail. Sometimes, because of his size, he seems to disappear into the herd, and from a distance it looks like I’m riding a cow, as all you can see is my body above the herd.

“I like cattle work,” Pierre continues, “as it teaches a horse balance, quick



Tinni frá Hellistandi navigates an obstacle course “ridden” by Shadow and handled by Alys Culhane. Photo by Pete Praetorius.



responses, and most importantly how to use his front and rear legs separately. It's also a great motivator: The horse seems to work with a purpose."

Icelandics, in Pierre's experience (and mine), much prefer work that has a purpose. That is why they excel at cattle work, trail work, scent training, and almost anything else you can imagine.

### AGILITY

Meet Alys Culhane (if you haven't already, by reading her articles in the Quarterly) from Palmer, Alaska. Her latest on the horse front is doing agility with her Icelandic horse Hrimmi (Hrimfara from Lough Arrow 2) carrying eight-month-old Shadow, an Australian Shepherd, on her back. Together, this dog-and-pony show completed the toughest obstacle yet in the online agility competition. Hrimmi broke two balloons, one with each foot, while Shadow supervised.

Shadow also goes for lengthy rides on Tinni frá Hellistandi.

Says Alys, "The benefits of agility training are to build partnership, to

allow your horses problem-solving time, which engages their brains, and to have fun. Learning happens best when we are relaxed and happily trying new things. Research tells us that optimal learning happens when the brain is engaged in problem solving in a novel setting."

### FOX HUNTING

RJ West and Lauren Murphy regularly ride to the hounds in the Woodbrook Fox Hunts in Washington State—the "fox" being a human runner sporting a fake fox tail and smelling of fox lure. Their Icelandics, Gloinn from Rivendell and Andi from Evans Farms, are great ambassadors with the fox hunting crowd, and other Icelandic riders join them on occasion as well.

### DRIVING

Several people I know have Icelandics that drive. Dianna and Mark Anderson hale from Ferndale, Washington. They have three Icelandics: a black-and-white pinto, India from M and M Stables; a cremello pinto, Melasól from Alfasaga;

and a sorrel mare, Vakning from Alfasaga.

In the picture you can see India pulling a Meadowbrook cart that Mark and Dianne found with a woman who, in her 80s, was still driving. The Andersons bought the cart in hopes of teaching their quarter horse to drive, but he did not want to be a cart horse. So they drove India. They started her with a small cart, but noticed that she began pulling on the lines, trying to communicate something, and walking crookedly instead of staying on the track. They figured out that the cart was too small for her and was rubbing her. Like many novice drivers, they also were pulling too much on the lines, they realized. Our Icelandics do their best to let us know when tack or our methods aren't working for them. Savvy owners listen and problem-solve with our brilliant equine partners.

When Mark and Dianna started to train India to drive, they began with lots and lots of ground driving first, before introducing the cart. India took to it so quickly that Dianne credits the horse



RJ West and Gloinn From Rivendell, Lauren Murphey and Andi From Evans Farms, Cindy Broune on "Daffy," and Becky Sexton on Villimey frá Lambafelli enjoy an informal hunt (no tweed jackets) on a bright clear day with Mount Rainier in the background. Photo by Geoffrey Tyson.



with teaching her how to drive. Dianne learned to soften her hands and to use very light signals. She discovered that when her hands and her signals were correct, India would lower her head, stop pulling on the reins, and hold a slow, steady pace. As their trust in one another grew, they both grew to enjoy the time spent with the cart.

As for tweaking the equipment so the fit is right for the horse, if you don't have an experienced teamster to teach you, there will be a period of trial and error before you know where to set each piece of the harness.

Dianna and Mark are now training Melasól and Vakning to drive as a team. They recently bought a conversion kit and plan to adapt their cart for a team to pull. Vakning is impatient, as young horses often are, and Melasól has the role of the older and wiser auntie who will guide Vakning's behavior.

## DRESSAGE

About 10 years ago, Lori Birge of Yakima, Washington attended an Icelandic horse clinic. "The clinician told us that if we couldn't work with an Icelandic horse trainer, to try a dressage trainer," Lori remembers. With that in mind, Lori attended a local dressage clinic with her Icelandic, but all that clinician told her was that Geisli couldn't do this or that. So Lori contacted a different dressage train-

er and asked if she would be willing to work with a gaited horse. Lo and behold, she was willing to give it a go. That started Lori and Geisli's dressage journey.

At first, the trainer would work with Lori and then have her ask questions at Icelandic horse clinics about what was appropriate for working in tölt. Lori soon discovered that any work done in trot could also be done in tölt. "At the beginning of this journey," she says, "Geisli was out of balance, with an inconsistent trot and a wild canter, but a decent tölt. We started doing lateral work in walk and tölt and, slowly, his balance improved as we became more educated. His trot became consistent, which also helped his other gaits, and even his work ethic improved as he became more athletic."

They kept attending Icelandic horse clinics, as well as taking weekly dressage lessons, and eventually Lori decided that she would like to ride some dressage tests. Her trainer asked the local dressage club if they would offer gaited dressage tests at their schooling shows, and the club agreed, so Lori started showing. "None of the judges had ever seen tölt before, but they were willing to judge our tests. The feedback was helpful, and we had fun."

Now, many years later, Lori is still taking dressage lessons and attending Icelandic horse clinics. "The Covid-19 pandemic put a damper on the clinics, but our lessons are still on. Geisli has be-

come a wonderful mount. He continues to improve, sometimes slowly but always getting better. His balance is so much better due to our dressage work."

## EQUITATION

Diana Harris has found a fun way to partner with her horse, Skuggi from Friskopp. Skuggi is registered with the Pleasure Saddle Horse Registry and competes in Working Equitation (WE), a sport that any breed can participate in. There are different trials in each competition and the final placing is determined by a combination of all the points earned.

"The first trial is dressage," she explains. "You have to ride a pre-determined pattern that is the official test for the level of competition you choose. After dressage, the next trial is ease of handling. This is an obstacle course, in which both the rider and the horse are judged for how well each obstacle is executed or navigated through. Your score includes the willingness of the horse and the horsemanship of the rider. The third trial is speed. At the introductory level, you don't compete in this area, but all other levels do. This speed trial is done on an obstacle course, which must be accurately and quickly completed. The fourth trial, cattle work, is not always offered at shows. In this trial, a team of three or four riders work together, as each rider separates a designated cow from the herd and moves it across the arena to a holding pen."

Diana was unable to compete in 2020, due to Covid-19, but hopes to do so in 2021. She notes that a new WE organization has recently been formed that combines two separate organizations into the United States of America Working Equitation. You can find more information at <https://usawe.org/>.

## SOMETHING NEW?

I myself mostly ride trails with my Icelandics, but I am always excited to hear of new things to try. Every opportunity helps me to provide the rich movement and brain stimulation that we all—and our horses—need. I have done Intrinzen groundwork and clicker training with my horses, and I am impressed with the excitement the mares show when I head out to the barn. Who doesn't love a horse that calls out and comes to see you when you show up?



Lori Birge does dressage with her Icelandic, Geisli from Vermont Icelandic Horse Farm. Photo by Janet Boggs.



# HERGILL'S NEXT CHAPTER

by Andrea Barber

Sometimes doing what's best for the horse isn't the easiest for us—at least at first. But when it's truly the right thing, it can bring a lot of joy despite your sadness.

Hergill frá Oddhóli arrived at our Sand Meadow Farm in the summer of 2012. For me, it was a dream come true. I had recently retired my beloved Víkingur frá Götu from riding and I was looking for my next partner. I had admired Hergill, a handsome dark bay first-prize stallion with an impressive competition record, for many years. Though I had only a crush on him from afar, I somehow knew he would be the perfect match for me. It was almost unbelievable when I had the opportunity to make him mine.

Hergill didn't disappoint. For eight wonderful years Hergill was my main riding horse. Extremely talented, superbly trained, with a gentle and kind character, he was an absolute joy. Since I don't show, he was no longer winning ribbons on the competition track. Instead, he made my heart sing on each trail ride, with his powerful fast tölt and flying trot. We enjoyed many activities together: clinics, drill team, parades, and, of course, trail riding. No matter what I asked of him, Hergill was always willing to try his best.

Hergill was also a favorite around the farm. We kept him a stallion for a couple of years and got two very nice foals from him—but then we gelded him so I could enjoy him as a riding horse full time. Despite having been a breeding stallion for so many years, Hergill quickly settled into the easy life of a gelding in a mixed herd. A kind and gentle leader, we used to joke that he was the “Chairman of the Board”: a quiet, experienced leader who didn't want to get involved in day-to-day operations. He expected peace and serenity in his herd, and he got it without fuss. All the other horses loved and respected him.

## GROW OLD WITH US?

One of our goals in getting our own farm years ago was to be able to keep our horses for the rest of their lives. We wanted to have our horses grow old with us and to be able to pamper them in their golden years. So this past year, when Hergill, at



Hergill shortly after his arrival to Sand Meadow Farm in New York in the summer of 2012. Photo by Andrea Barber.

age 23, eased into retirement from riding, I was looking forward to taking care of him here for the rest of his life. I wanted to spoil him as a “special” horse deserves. I pictured many more pleasant years of doting on him. There was no way I could ever dream of him being anywhere else

but with me.

But through the summer I slowly started to realize that this maybe wasn't such a great plan—at least for Hergill. He seemed puzzled each time I went out to the field with a halter and took another horse to ride. Normally extremely toler-



ant with the foals, he was becoming a bit irritated with their antics. The new young geldings in their prime that we were importing from Iceland were beginning to challenge his quiet leadership, and I wondered just how long it would be before one of them succeeded. As a former stallion, Hergill always kept a wary eye on our stallion, Strákur frá Vatnsleysu, across the fences. My other gelding, Vífill frá Glæsibæ, was constantly bugging Hergill to play. The mares with their squabbles were something Hergill wanted no part of. As is his nature, Hergill never showed any complaint and quietly went about his day. But knowing him so well it was clear that, although I enjoyed having him here, he wasn't enjoying being here so much at this stage of his life.

But what to do about it? I found myself thinking about this question a lot as fall turned to winter, with no good answer.

## TWO BROTHERS

Then on December 24, Christmas Eve, I was mindlessly scrolling through Facebook when I saw that my friend Leda Blumberg had lost her wonderful Demantur frá Reykjavík at age 30. I had known Leda for years, through our Icelandic community, and in particular I was always charmed by how she took such good care of Demantur in his aging years. Not many people have her kind of heart. Demantur was a stallion previously owned by Mill Farm, and I had always admired his beautiful presence. In fact, I would occasionally write Leda through the years wondering if she still had Demantur and how he was doing. Now, I quickly wrote Leda a note expressing how terribly sorry and sad I was hearing that Demantur had passed on. But then, right after I hit "Send," something in my head clicked.

It occurred to me that, with Demantur gone, Leda's other Icelandic, Bráinn frá Oddhóli, would be alone and without a friend. It just so happens that Hergill and Bráinn are half brothers, both from the great stallion Logi frá Skarði. Not only that, but their mothers, Hekla frá Oddhóli (Hergill) and Röst frá Kópavogi (Bráinn) are half sisters from the honor prize mare Gola frá Brekkum. Plus, Hergill and Bráinn were both born at the famous Oddholl in south Iceland only one year apart. Maybe these two brothers, who had probably grown up together,

would now like to grow old together?

I knew Leda had a wonderful farm (Faraway Farm Alpacas) here in New York, about five hours away from Sand Meadow, and that she took excellent care of her animals. Seeing how she had lovingly cared for Demantur, I knew she understood what it was to have a "special" horse and that she was willing to commit to an aging horse until the end. Maybe this was where Hergill was meant to be? Maybe he could find a new purpose as a companion to his brother? It was a crazy idea—but it just felt so right on many levels. So I sent another note to Leda explaining everything, sure that she would think I was a crazy woman.

I do think Leda was a bit shocked at first. Demantur hadn't even been buried 24 hours, and here I was contacting her out of nowhere suggesting that she get another horse. That's a lot to process. But

Christmas provided a day of buffer for everyone to think things over, and after she saw how sad Bráinn was alone (she had hoped her donkey pair would welcome him into their little herd, but they didn't want anything to do with him), we had some good conversations. We also both talked it over with our families. Everyone on both sides felt like this was the right move. I agreed to contact a local shipper we've used often for our clients to see if she might be able to transport Hergill soon.

## GREAT FRIENDS

Well, to my shock "soon" meant really soon. That's how I found myself just two days later crying and clutching my husband, Steve, in the driveway at 5:20 a.m. as the trailer pulled away with Hergill inside. It just didn't seem real, and I spent the rest of the day furiously worrying. Did



After a long career as a breeding stallion and competition horse, Hergill came to the U.S. and became Andrea Barber's favorite riding horse. Here they enjoy the trails in the summer of 2018. Photo by Steven Barber.





life with a purpose. That joy is well worth a bit of sadness to me.

I think we all like to believe that our home is the best place for our animals. No doubt that's because we love and cherish them so much. But the truth is, what's best for them may not always be what's best for us. True love means recognizing that and acting on it, even at the expense of some personal pain.

Thank you Hergill for all you have given me. You deserve only the very best, and I'm glad I was able to let go and give it to you. I will enjoy reading your next chapter.

At left, four-year-old Hergill at a breeding evaluation in Vöðidalur, ridden by his breeder and trainer Sigurbjörn ("Diddi") Bárðarson. Photo by Eiríkur Jónsson. Below, the brothers Bráinn frá Oddhóli and Hergill frá Oddhóli enjoying their old age together. Photo by Leda Blumberg.

I make the right decision? What if Hergill and Bráinn didn't get along? What if Leda didn't like Hergill? Was I just throwing my special horse away?

Later that day I was crying again—but it was tears of joy when I heard from Leda! Within the first moment of his arrival Hergill and Bráinn were instant friends—even grooming one another! That's something that Hergill almost never did with any of the horses here at Sand Meadow. Did the two brothers remember each other from their birthplace in Iceland, so many years ago? I guess only they know. But what is clear is that they are now great friends and companions spending their days enjoying Leda's beautiful and peaceful farm side-by-side. Leda puts out multiple piles of hay—but they always choose to eat together. At night they can be found snuggled up together in the run-in shed. It's an amazing bond. Even better than Leda and I could have hoped for.

From the photos Leda sends—of the brothers together, of Hergill with Leda's daughter and grandson, of Hergill gently touching noses with an alpaca—I can tell he is happy. He is well-loved by Leda, her family, and his brother Bráinn. Yes, I am still sad when I go out to the barn and he's not there. But instead of just wasting away here feeling like an extra wheel, he is instead enjoying the next chapter of his







## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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I am a United States Citizen and/or my primary residence\* is the United States.

*\*Primary Residence - must reside in the US for a minimum of 6 months and one day per calendar year to be eligible.*

I prefer **not** to receive a copy of the *Quarterly* magazine in the US Mail.

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If you have selected a **Family Membership** please complete the following for the second adult and any children to be included in the membership (use the back of the page to add more family members):

Name	Year of Birth (juniors only)	Email (optional)

**Farm Listing** Paid members of the USIHC may opt to include a farm listing on the Congress' website ([www.icelandics.org](http://www.icelandics.org)) and printed in *The Icelandic Horse Quarterly*. There is a \$110.00 annual fee for the farm listing in addition to your membership fee.

Farm: ..... Owners: .....

Address: .....

City: ..... State: ..... Zip Code: .....

Phone: ..... Email: ..... Web: .....

Membership Fees & Restrictions	
<b>Individual</b>	\$45/year. One Adult. One vote.
<b>Family</b>	\$65/year. Two adults and unlimited children living in the same household. Adults vote.
<b>Junior</b>	\$35/year. One child (under 18 years). Not eligible to vote.

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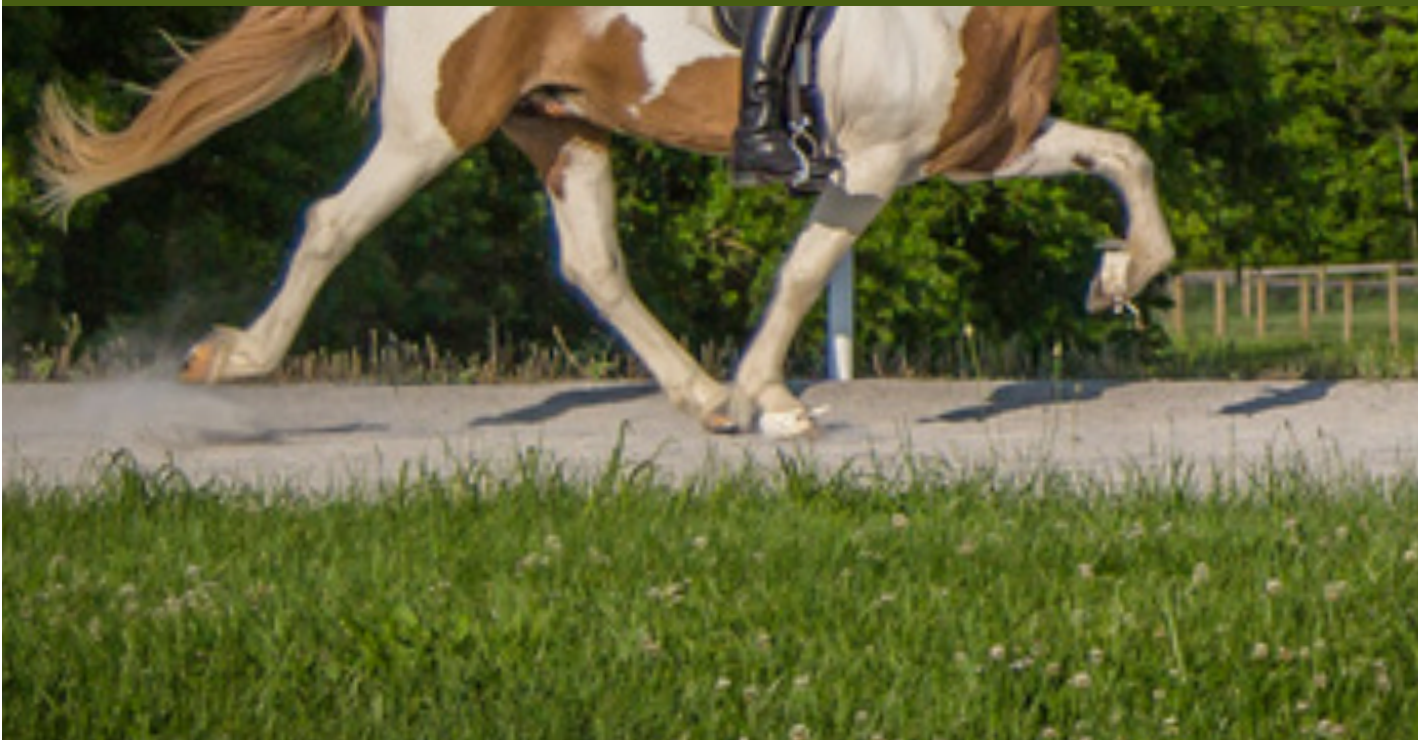


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Caeli Cavanagh BSci Riding and Riding Instruction, Hólar University, Level 3 FEIF Trainer

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Hátíð frá Hemlu II, Total w/o pace: 8.69  
Gammur frá Hemlu II, Total: 8.37

Contact: Kristina Behringer  
Tel: 307-757-7915  
Email: gyetorp2@gmail.com

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Hestar Ranch  
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Lough Arrow Icelandics  
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www.coloradoicelandics.com

Tamangur Icelandic Horses  
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Larkspur, Colorado 80118  
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coralie@tamangur-icelandics.com  
www.tamangur-icelandics.com

Tolt Mountain Ranch  
Thomas R Dowding  
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Westcliffe, Colorado 81252  
(619) 977-4975  
dowdingtom@gmail.com

## IOWA

Harmony Icelandics  
Virginia Lauridsen  
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Des Moines, IA 50315  
(515) 556-3307  
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## KENTUCKY

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6105 Eminence Pike  
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maggie@lettleikiicelandics.com  
www.lettleikiicelandics.com

Taktur Icelandic Horses  
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taktur.horse

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## NORTH CAROLINA

Hulinndalur  
Sara Lyter  
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## SOUTH CAROLINA

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8033078270  
blackcreekfarm@me.com  
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## SOUTH DAKOTA

Morning Star Farm  
Margaret Hillenbrand  
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Rapid City, South Dakota 57702  
(605) 381-4956  
hillenbrandmimi@gmail.com

## VERMONT

Lunar Hill Icelandics  
Jana Meyer  
151 North Bridgewater Road  
Bridgewater, Vermont 05034  
(603) 856-6697  
lunarhill70@gmail.com  
www.lunarhillicelandics.com

Mad River Valley Icelandic Horses, LLC  
Jess Haynsworth  
1268 Fuller Hill Rd  
Warren, Vermont 05674  
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madrivervalleyicelandics@gmail.com  
www.madrivervalleyicelandics.com

## VIRGINIA

Montaire Icelandic Horses  
Antje Freygang  
36727 Leith Lane  
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freygang999@gmail.com  
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## WEST VIRGINIA

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