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Summer 2026



Get Them Off Their Hands

by Jack Marston

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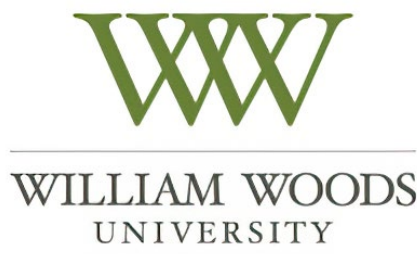
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Dear ARIA

*Real questions from working instructors.
Straight answers from the ARIA.*

Every instructor runs into the same knot sooner or later — the parent who won't let go, the student who's outgrown you, the waiver you're not sure covers you. Send yours to the address at the end of this column, and we'll work through it together, in print, no names.

The Student Who Won't Pay

Dear ARIA — I have a longtime adult student who is always "going to catch up" on what she owes. She's three months behind now and I dread the conversation because I actually like her and she's part of the barn family. How do I handle this without blowing up the relationship?

Owed in Ohio

Dear Owed — You already know the answer, you just don't want to be the one to say it, so I'll say it for you. She is not a friend who happens to take lessons. She is a client who is three months delinquent, and the "barn family" framing is exactly what she's counting on to keep you quiet. Liking someone and being owed by them are two different accounts, and you're letting one cover for the other.

Have the conversation this week, in person, warm and completely unapologetic. Tell her you value having her in the barn and that the balance needs to be settled, then hand her the number in writing and offer a payment plan with dates on it. Do not soften it into a maybe. And going forward, fix the system that let this happen: lessons are paid in advance, or on the day, every time, for everyone. A clear policy applied to all of your students is not unfriendly. It's the thing that lets you keep liking the people you teach, because money stops being the ghost in every lesson.

The Parent In The Ring

Dear ARIA — I teach a talented ten-year-old whose mother stands at the rail and coaches

over me the entire lesson. The child is getting confused and I'm getting frustrated. I don't want to lose the client, but I can't teach like this. What do I do?

Two Coaches Too Many

Dear Two Coaches — A child cannot follow two instructors at once, and right now she's trying to, which is why she's confused. This isn't really about the mother being difficult. It's about a boundary you haven't set yet, and the good news is that setting it is entirely within your control.

Talk to the mother privately, never in front of the child. Lead with the daughter, because that's the ground you both actually share: "She's doing beautifully, and to keep her progressing she needs to focus on one voice in the ring so she can learn to think for herself." Then give the mother a real job — a spot to watch from, something specific to look for, a note to compare with you afterward. Most rail-coaching parents aren't trying to undermine you. They're anxious and they don't know what else to do with their hands. Give the worry somewhere to go and the ring gets quiet. If it doesn't, you have a different conversation, but nine times out of ten this one does it.

Is A Signed Waiver Enough?

Dear ARIA — I have every student sign a liability waiver before they ride. A friend told me a waiver "doesn't really hold up anyway," and now I'm worried I'm not actually protected. Am I?

Nervous About the Fine Print

Dear Nervous — Your friend is half right, which is the most dangerous kind of right. A waiver is real protection, but it is one layer, not a force field, and how well it holds up depends heavily on your state, on how the waiver is written, and on whether you were actually doing your job when something went wrong. A well-drafted, state-specific waiver signed by an adult is worth having. A generic form you pulled off the internet may be worth much less than you think.

So here's the honest answer: don't rely on the waiver alone, and don't take your legal comfort from a friend at the barn or from this column. Do three things. Carry proper liability insurance, because that's the layer that actually pays when a waiver is challenged. Have an attorney in your own state review your waiver and confirm your state's equine-activity statute and signage requirements. And keep teaching to standard and documenting it, because the best protection you will ever have is being genuinely careful and being able to show it. A waiver plus insurance plus good practice is a strong position. Any one of them alone is a gamble.



GOT A KNOT OF YOUR OWN?

Write to Dear ARIA at
chris@riding-instructor.com.

Questions are printed anonymously — first names and locations changed. This column is general guidance for working instructors, not legal advice.



See You in September - Taking a Summer Break

By Didi Arias

Unbelievably, half the year has nearly flown by and summer is already upon us. With the break from formal academics, our teaching roles may be subject to change or be re-defined as plans are underway for the

activities over the upcoming weeks.

Will the facility continue to provide the usual classes?

Is there to be a change in service?

The student may now have some different options that were not available to them during the scholastic year and with more time available, perhaps have the chance to ride more frequently, or get to try some dif-

ferent types of riding experiences.

Some stables will change over from regular hourly lessons to day activities or workshops; perhaps students will have the chance to participate in a lease-a-horse program, as we regular students did when we were kids. Some facilities may make a seasonal shift to cater to different types of clients if they are located in a touristic area – this may be a main source of income to keep the place in the green throughout the whole year. Lessons may stop, but trail riding or summer camp programs may become the focus. I know of one school that closes up shop altogether, putting the horses out to a well-deserved summer rest.

However, some students/parents may want to opt out and put a hold on all academic and extra activities, using the summer to have the child kick back and just enjoy a bit of R and R. No schedules, no pressures. In other words, take a break.

Previously, I have written on the merits of extending the learning by assigning homework and keeping up a regular practice between lessons: all with the goal to keep the body and mind tuned and toned, and to help with skill mastery. The idea being the more one practices, they better they can become, which still holds true, but it absolutely okay to take a break. We love our sport, we love to be involved in teaching others to love it, too, and with that, we understand that an occasional pause can really benefit the student. Summer gives that timely opportunity.

Taking a break can offer a refreshing routine change, allowing for physical rest and recovery. Mentally, it acts as a “mind-cation” and helps to prevent burnout. Parents also enjoy the break from heavy, activity-filled schedules, most appreciating one less chauffeuring job for a few weeks. Parents can feel burned-out, too.

Taking a summer break from their regular sport can release the student from being tied to just one activity and gives the

chance to try something new, which can lead to new opportunities. In having new experiences, the child can get a fresh perspective when they return to riding after the summer holidays.

Generally, family plans revolve around the summer months, and it is usual that regular school year activities come to a halt so members can enjoy vacation, trip and other times together. With the summer break comes the chance at achieving a balance that is hard to find during the rest of the year, swinging between experiencing different environments, opportunities to meet new people and trying different things to moments for leisure and rest.

Like all seasons, summer is to be embraced (because you can't get away from them unless you move to a different hemisphere), but that is not a concept the child that is missing their lessons wants to ponder. They only feel the lazy days of summer are too long, slow moving and horseless. Before heading in to summer, discuss any programs or activities that are on offer as there will be those that will be interested to keep their child's hand (better said, “their seat”) in. Some parents will be concerned that taking the summer off will interrupt the learning flow or cause a setback. However, I know of no child that fell apart, lost all fitness nor the ability to maintain mental focus over the short weeks of a summer break. On the contrary, summer is a time for kids to enjoy keeping active by swimming, cycling, hiking, running around with friends and just being able to play. Activities like these allow for social interactions, freedom and creativity. Looking back at my own childhood summers, those moments were the luxury time of the year, allowing us to indulge in the act of “just being kids”. There are no memories like those memories, and if only we could once again sleep like we slept at the end of a full summer's day of activity and play. There were also many times of needed quiet, an “own” time, when you could draw (horses), paint (horses), read (horse stories),

lay in the grass and observe bugs in the clover, snooze under the shade of a tree. Both the neighbourhood we lived in as well as the neighbourhood where we went on vacation had organized summer “playground” days where you could just go and do fun and quiet things like craft projects (there is no counting all the potholders we loomed or plastic string keychains we laced). We also formed new friendships from people outside of our riding circles: in my case, one that lasted a lifetime.

Feel certain that a well-timed break over the summer has plenty of benefits. Every year I saw my students bounce back in, looking refreshed, stronger and energized – ready to take on the next riding challenges. A needed reset and that rest from a particular challenge may be all that was necessary from it becoming too big of an obstacle. Sometimes you just need to step away for a while.

There is no rule that says that we have to be active all the time: down time can be very good time. In fact, you may want to take a break yourself.



About the author:

Didi Arias is a Level 3 ARIA Certified Instructor and national dressage judge and teacher, who resides in Almeria, Spain.

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Get Them Off Their Hands

By Jack Marston

You cannot teach feel with your mouth. But you can build a rider who finally stops steering with her fingers and starts riding with her seat — if you know what you are actually looking for.

I have watched a lot of riders over the years grab at a horse's mouth like the reins were the only thing keeping them on the planet. Beginner, intermediate, sometimes folks who ought to know better. They get nervous or they get busy, and the first thing that happens is the hands come up and the fingers clamp down, and now they are trying to drive a horse the way you would steer a shopping cart. It does not work on a shopping cart either, if you have ever pushed one with a bad wheel.

The thing every good horseman eventually figures out is that the hands are the last place a horse should be hearing from, not the first. A finished horse rides off your seat and your legs. The reins are for fine-tuning, not for driving. But you cannot just tell a rider that and expect it to land, because feel is not something that goes in through the ears. It goes in through the seat of the pants, and your job as a teacher is to set up the situation where they can finally feel it for themselves.

Why the Hands Win

Hands win because hands are where we live. We are people. We do everything with our hands, all day long, and when a rider gets worried the hands are the first thing that reaches for control. It is not a riding problem, it is a human problem that shows up on a horse. Understanding that changes how you fix it, because you quit scolding the rider for something that is wired into them and you start giving them a better place to put that need for control.

And here is the part that matters for summer, when you have got a barn full of casual riders and camp kids and folks knocking rust off: a rider who is riding off her hands is a rider who is a little bit scared, whether she would say so or not. The clamping is a tell. Loosen the grip on the reins and nine times out of ten you have loosened something in the rider's head too. That is where the mental side and the physical side turn out to be the same thing.

“

“Feel does not go in through the ears. It goes in through the seat of the pants.”

”

Take the Reins Away

The fastest way I know to teach a rider to ride off her seat is to take the reins out of the equation for a while. On a safe horse, in a safe space, on the longe or in a small pen where the horse is not going anywhere he should not, knot the reins and have the rider drop them. Now she has got nothing to grab. Now the only things she has left to talk to the horse with are the two things you actually wanted her using all along, which are her seat and her legs.

It is remarkable what happens. A rider who has spent months hauling on a horse's face will sit there for a minute looking a little lost, and then her body starts sorting it out on its own. She finds her balance because she has to. She feels the horse's rhythm come up through the saddle because there is nothing else competing for her attention. You will see her shoulders drop and her breathing settle, and about then you can start asking her to notice things. Feel him swing through his back. Feel which hind leg is reaching under. That is feel arriving, and it arrived because you got the hands out of the way.

Name What They Feel

Once a rider is starting to feel something, your job shifts. Now you are putting words

on it, because a feeling a rider cannot name is a feeling she cannot go find again on her own. When she gets a good soft transition off her seat, tell her right then, in the moment: that, what you just did, that is riding off your seat, remember how that felt. You are building a library for her. Every good feeling you name and she files away is one she can reach for the next time, and eventually she is not waiting on you to tell her, she knows it in her own body.

This is the same thing the sport-psychology folks are talking about when they go on about awareness, they have just got fancier words for it. A rider who can feel what is happening and name it is a rider who can fix it herself. A rider who is riding on hope and hanging onto the reins is always going to need somebody standing in the middle of the pen hollering at her. One of those riders is going to keep getting better after she leaves your barn. The other one is not.

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Let the Horse Do the Teaching

The last piece, and maybe the most important, is picking the right horse for this work. A rider learning to trust her seat needs a horse who is going to reward her for it, not punish her for it. You want the honest, broke horse who travels along steady and does not take a dropped rein as an invitation to leave the county. On that kind of horse, letting go feels safe, and safe is the whole ballgame, because a rider only learns feel when she is relaxed enough to feel anything at all.

Put that same rider on a nervous or a green horse with the reins knotted and you have taught her the exact opposite lesson, which is that letting go gets you into trouble. So spend your good horse on this. The steady old campaigner who has taught half your students their diagonals is worth more to your program than any amount of talk, because he can teach the one thing your mouth never will. He can let a rider feel it for herself. That is the whole job. Get them off their hands, get them onto their seat, and get out of the way while the horse finishes what you started.



About the author:

Jack Marston is a lifelong horseman based in sunny Southern California. Growing up surrounded by horses, he developed a deep passion for the sport, specializing in Western disciplines. Today, he operates a small training facility where he coaches riders of all levels and competes in reining events. When not at the barn, Jack enjoys surfing and exploring the California coast with his family.



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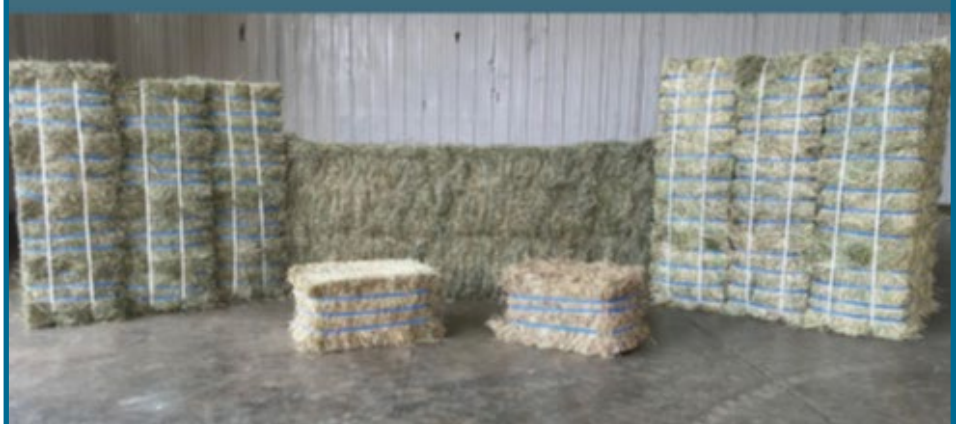
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Rewiring Your Inner Dialogue to Shape Your Performance

Laura King CHt, NLP & Performance Coach

You have spent years earning the right to stand where you stand. The lessons, the clinics, the horses that humbled you and the ones that taught you more than you ever expected. The early mornings, long days, missed holidays, and countless hours spent helping horses and riders become better versions of themselves.

By any reasonable measure, you are qualified. You are experienced. You are a professional.

Yet even the most accomplished trainers occasionally hear a different message. Before entering the ring, teaching a clinic, riding in front of an audience, or simply facing a challenging day at the barn, a small voice may begin questioning whether you're prepared enough, experienced enough, or good enough.

The interesting thing is that confidence isn't determined by whether those thoughts appear. Confidence is determined by what happens next.

As horse professionals, we understand that performance is influenced by much more than physical skill. Horses remind us of that every day. They respond not only to our aids, but also to our energy, focus, consistency, and confidence. A horse doesn't simply react to what we do. It responds to how we show up.

The same principle applies to us.

The conversation taking place in our minds has a powerful influence on how we perform, how we teach, how we make decisions, and how we lead. When that conversation is supportive and constructive, it can help us perform at our best. When it becomes overly critical or negative, it can quietly undermine even the most capable professional.

The Story You Tell Yourself Matters

Researchers have found that most of us carry on an internal dialogue, or self-talk, at a rate of between 150 and 300 words per minute. That's a relentless, largely unconscious

monologue running in the background of everything you do. Most of it is mundane, routine, and harmless.

Where did I put my spurs?

This horse needs to be more forward.

I should return that call.

The challenge begins when that dialogue turns negative and stays there.

When negative self-talk becomes habitual, it stops being an occasional bad mood and starts becoming a belief system. You begin to construct what psychologists call *limiting beliefs*—fixed ideas about yourself and your abilities that operate below the level of conscious thought. You don't simply decide to believe them. You start to act as if they're true.

You don't enter the show.

You undercharge for your services.

You defer to the clinician even when you know, professionally and instinctively, that you're right.

You make yourself smaller, quieter, and easier to overlook.

Not because you lack talent, experience, or expertise, but because you've accepted a story about yourself that no longer serves you.

The encouraging news is that stories can be rewritten.

Horse trainers may actually be better equipped than most people to understand this concept because we witness the effects of confidence and uncertainty every day. We see horses become more relaxed when they trust their rider. We see students improve when they begin believing in their abilities. We spend our careers helping others develop confidence, yet many of us struggle to ex-

tend the same kindness and encouragement to ourselves.

Somewhere along the way, many professionals develop the habit of speaking to themselves in ways they would never speak to a student, client, or friend.

Imagine a rider coming out of the ring after making a mistake. You wouldn't tell them they were a failure. You wouldn't tell them they didn't belong there. You wouldn't suggest they give up because one ride didn't go as planned.

You would coach them. You would help them learn from the experience. You would remind them of what they did well and what they can improve next time.

The question is: why don't we offer ourselves the same courtesy?

Positive self-talk is not about pretending everything is perfect. It isn't about ignoring mistakes or refusing to acknowledge areas for improvement. It is about replacing unnecessary criticism with constructive coaching.

Instead of saying, *I always mess this up*, try *I'm learning and improving every time I do this*.

Instead of *I'm not ready*, try *I've prepared for this and I'll do my best*.

Instead of *I don't belong here*, try *I've earned the opportunity to be here*.

Those small shifts may seem insignificant, but they can create powerful changes over time.

Changing the Conversation

One of the simplest ways to begin changing your self-talk is to become aware of it. Most of us move through our day without paying much attention to the words running through our minds. Once you begin noticing those patterns, you gain the ability to change them.

Many people find success with a simple technique called thought-stopping. When you catch yourself engaging in negative self-talk, interrupt the thought. Some people say the word “cancel” out loud. Others take a deep breath and consciously replace the thought with something more constructive. The specific method matters less than the interruption itself.

Like any skill, it improves with practice.

After all, horse trainers understand repetition. We don’t expect a horse to master a new concept after a single ride. We understand that learning takes consistency. The same is true for the mind.

For those who want to create deeper and more lasting change, hypnosis can be an effective tool because it works directly with subconscious patterns and beliefs. While many people associate hypnosis with stage performances and entertainment, clinical hypnosis is simply a focused state of attention that allows positive change to occur at a deeper level. It can help individuals identify limiting beliefs and replace them with beliefs that better support their goals and performance.

Whether you choose hypnosis, coaching, journaling, meditation, or intentional self-awareness, the goal is the same: to develop an inner dialogue that supports your success rather than undermines it.

One of my favorite tools involves two simple words: I am.

The statements that follow those words become part of your identity.

I am capable.

I am prepared.

I am learning.

I am resilient.

I am a professional.

In my book *Perfect Enough*, I discuss the importance of the language we use when speaking to ourselves. The words that follow “I am” communicate powerful messages to the subconscious mind. Over time, those messages influence how we think, feel, and behave.

Choose them wisely.

The Professional You’ve Already Become

The horse industry is demanding. The standards are high. We work in a profession where performance is often visible, feedback can be immediate, and perfection can feel like the expectation.

But confidence does not come from being perfect.

Confidence comes from trusting yourself despite imperfections.

Every horse trainer has learned through successes, setbacks, exceptional horses, difficult horses, mentors, students, victories, disappointments, and years of hard-earned experience. Those experiences have shaped the professional you are today.

You have already done the hard work of becoming qualified.

Now give yourself permission to recognize it.

The next time you walk into the barn, stand at the in-gate, step into the ring, or teach a lesson, pay attention to the conversa-

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tion happening in your mind. Ask yourself whether the words you're using are helping you become the professional you want to be.

Because your inner dialogue shapes your performance.

Choose words that strengthen your confidence, support your growth, and reflect the capable professional you've worked so hard to become.

Laura King is a certified hypnotherapist, sports performance coach, and author of Perfect Enough. She works with riders, trainers, athletes, and professionals to help them achieve peak performance through hypnosis and mindset training.

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Hard Ground, Hard Feet

By Karen Cole

Every summer the footing bakes solid and the cracks appear. Most of it is preventable — if we know what we are looking at, and we stop assuming the dry season is the safe one.

There is a rhythm to the horseman's year, and if you have kept horses long enough you can feel summer coming in the ground under your boots before you see it on the calendar. The rain tapers off, the pasture firms up, and by July the paddock that was soft as a sponge in April has set like a driveway. Our horses have not changed at all. Their footing has changed completely, and their feet are the first place it shows.

I spent years thinking about summer footing the way most of us do, which is to say I thought about the arena. We drag it and water it and fuss over the depth, and all of that is worthwhile. But I gave far less thought to what the hard ground was doing to the foot itself, and I have come to believe that oversight costs our horses more soundness in the warm months than almost anything else we do or fail to do. The good news, and the reason I wanted to write this, is that nearly all of it is within our power to prevent.

Why the Dry Season Fools Us

Here is the thing I had backward for a long time. I assumed the wet spring was the dangerous season, all that mud and softness inviting thrush and bruised soles, and I relaxed once the ground dried out. It turns out the dry, hard season asks just as much of a foot, only more quietly.

A healthy hoof is roughly a quarter water, and it behaves in a drought about the way the rest of us do. When the air and the ground pull moisture out of the wall faster than the horse can replace it, the wall loses its flexibility. A supple wall flexes with the foot and absorbs the shock of every stride. A dry, brittle wall cannot flex, so instead it cracks. Those little surface lines that ap-

“***The dry, hard season asks just as much of a foot as the mud. It just asks more quietly.***”

pear along the wall in high summer are not nothing. They are the foot telling us it has run short on give, and if we ignore them they travel. A crack that works its way up toward the coronary band has stopped being a cosmetic worry and become a soundness problem.

Learning to Look

You do not need to be a farrier to catch this early. You need to pick up every foot and actually look at it, and to my mind that is a habit worth building into every rider in the barn who is old enough to hold a hoof pick. I run my eye around the wall for vertical lines, especially any that have started to widen or that I can catch with a fingernail. I look at the white line where the wall meets the sole for any chalky separation or stretching. I check the heels for cracks running up from the bulbs and for signs of contraction.

I pay the closest attention to the horses working hardest. In a lesson barn that means

the steady schoolmasters carrying five and six rides a week, because they are taking far more concussion on that hard ground than the retiree dozing in the back field, and they will show the wear first. If one of those good horses starts shortening his stride on firm footing, or drifting toward the softer edges of the ring, I have learned not to file it under laziness. I feel his feet for heat, I check his digital pulse, and I get my farrier's eyes on him before I get back on.

Shoes, Bare Feet, and Honesty

I am not going to try to settle the barefoot-versus-shod question in these pages, because horsemen have been arguing it for as long as there have been both kinds of horses and neither side is going to hand me the last word. What I will say is that summer is a season for matching the foot honestly to the work and the ground in front of you. A barefoot horse on hard, abrasive footing can wear his wall down faster than it grows, and a horse who is genuinely sore on gravel is not going to become comfortable because someone read a persuasive article. Equally, a light summer with generous turnout can be exactly the right time to pull shoes and let a foot function, provided we transition sensibly and do not expect the horse to march down a rocky trail the next morning.

The honest answer is that it depends on the individual foot, which is precisely the conversation to have with your farrier rather than with the internet. The one thing that does not depend on anything is the schedule. Feet keep growing whether or not the calendar says summer, and a foot allowed to go too long between trims on hard ground is a foot being set up to crack. I keep my horses on their farrier's cycle in July as faithfully as in any other month, and I have never once regretted it.

The Truth About Moisture

We all want a product to buy. We want the hoof dressing and the supplement and the tub the horse can stand in, because a

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“You cannot moisturize a hoof from a bottle. What matters comes from the inside, and from the environment.”

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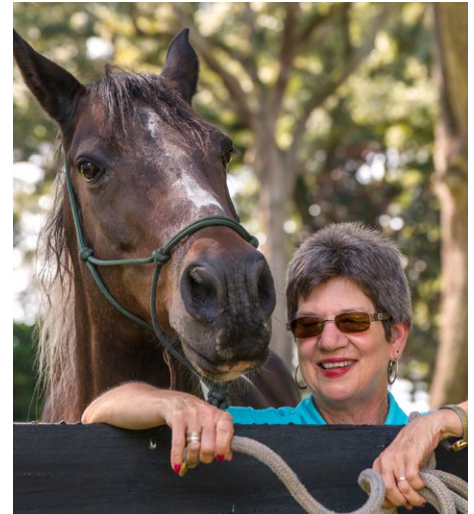
purchase feels like an action. I have made most of those purchases in my time, and I have come to think most of them are theater. You cannot meaningfully moisturize a hoof from the outside with a brush-on dressing, and several of the popular ones actually seal the surface in a way that does more harm than good. The moisture that matters reaches the foot from the inside, through a sound diet and good circulation, and from the horse's environment.

If you want to do one genuinely useful thing for summer feet, manage that environment thoughtfully. A horse who walks through a naturally damp spot on his way to water takes healthy moisture up into his feet with every trip. A clean, slightly damp area around the trough does more good than anything you can pour from a bottle. What we are really trying to spare the foot is the worst daily swing, the bone-dry pasture all afternoon followed by a deeply bedded stall all night, because it is exactly that constant expansion and contraction of the wall that drives a small crack deeper.

What It Comes Down To

A lesson program rests on the soundness of a fairly small number of good horses, and in summer their feet carry more stress than at any other time of the year. None of us needs to become a hoof specialist to protect them. We need to pick feet up daily, teach our students to do the same, keep our farriers on a faithful schedule, and treat any change in the way a horse travels on hard ground as information worth heeding rather than a mood to be corrected.

A crack caught in July is a trim and a conversation with your farrier. That same crack ignored until September can be weeks of stall rest and a hole in the lesson schedule none of us can afford. The ground is going to be hard this summer whether we pay attention or not. The whole difference lies in whether we were looking.



About the author:

Karen Cole is a lifelong equestrian with a passion for all things horses. Based in the rolling hills of Kentucky, she spends her days training young riders, competing in hunter/jumper events, and writing about his experiences in the horse world. When not in the saddle, Karen enjoys exploring the local trails with her beloved dog, a loyal companion who often accompanies her to the barn.”

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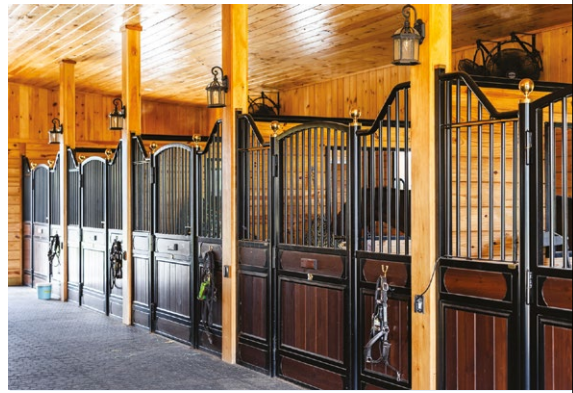
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The Australian Stock Horse: THE BREED FOR EVERY NEED

By Janet Forster

Instructors are always on the look out for mounts that can quietly carry a beginner in the morning and confidently pop a grid with a jumping student after lunch. Enter the Australian Stock Horse, or ASH for short. We've dubbed them "the breed for every need" and, yes, it's a bold claim but they back it up daily across multiple equestrian disciplines.

A Heritage Forged In Hardship

To understand this remarkable versatility, we have to look back at the unique history of horses in this country because the modern Australian Stock Horse is the custodian of an incredible survival story.

Horses are not native to Australia. In fact, with its brutal climate and rugged bush, it's the last place you would expect them to thrive. Yet thrive they have because today Australia has roughly one horse for every twenty people, and the largest feral horse population in the world.

That incredible equine density grew from tiny, brutal beginnings.

The first Australian horses (a stallion, 3 mares, and 3 colts) arrived with the First Fleet in 1788. They came from the Dutch colony at Cape Town (South Africa), having been purchased when the fleet stopped there to reprovision for the final leg of the journey from England. In 1795, the ship *Britannia* followed the same process, arriving in Sydney with a major cargo of high-quality breeding mares all sourced entirely from the Cape.

The Cape Horse

The decision to buy livestock from Cape Town was strategic for several reasons.

First, initially everything – people, livestock, supplies – had to be brought over in ships via a gruelling 9-month trip from England across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Cape Town though was 2 months sailing time closer to Australia, which meant livestock purchased there only had to survive 7 months at sea!

And survive is the operative word here. During transit, horses were suspended in tight canvas slings beneath the decks to stop them from falling and breaking legs when the ships pitched in heavy seas. They stood in poorly ventilated, dark, damp cargo holds, and endured extreme tropical heat, freezing



southern ocean temperatures, and strictly rationed, often mouldy feed and stale water.

These horses had to be tough and resilient to survive the trip. Many didn't so those that did were exceptionally tough and hardy.

Second, the Cape Horse was physically superior in terms of suitability for the Australian environment. These weren't delicate European animals used to lush pastures and cool climates but a unique, hardened mix of Indonesian ponies, Persian Arabs, and Spanish Barb bloodlines. They'd been bred for generations in dry, hot climates that almost perfectly mirrored the Australian bush.

When they arrived in New South Wales, they survived because they already had:

- **Iron feet:** They were already accustomed to hard, dry ground, meaning their hooves didn't split or break like horses brought from damp English pastures.
- **Good foraging instincts:** They could thrive on scrubby, low-nutrient native grasses and knew how to find water in a drought.
- **Innate stamina:** They possessed a dense bone structure and natural resistance to heat stress.

Enter the UK Racehorses

While South Africa provided the tough, hardy foundation bloodlines, the UK provided the ultimate upgrades in speed and refinement.

By the 1810s and 1820s, the seas were safer after the Napoleonic Wars, and wealthy free settlers had the money to import directly from Britain. They began bringing over elite English Thoroughbred stallions, like Rockingham in 1799, and highly prized English racing mares.

This created the perfect genetic storm. When breeders crossed the lightning-fast, deep-lunged UK Thoroughbreds with the indestructible, rock-hard colonial Cape stock, they created a horse that could run all day over brutal terrain without breaking down.

Incidentally, the modern Australian thoroughbred has also benefited from this tough heritage and is renowned for its strong bone and hardy constitution.

The Waler

This genetic recipe ultimately gave rise to the legendary Waler, the iconic mount of the Australian Light Horsemen in the Boer and First World Wars. It's also a large part of the reason why the Australian Stock Horse treats versatility and toughness as a



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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birthright. Australian Walers were famous for surviving the harshest desert conditions. They possessed an unmatched work ethic and a rock-solid temperament under extreme pressure. So, when the Australian Stock Horse Society was established in 1971, the founders sought to preserve this exact blueprint of stamina, athletic ability, and intelligence.

The breed is renowned for its mental adapt-

ability. Genetically wired to work, they thrive on having a job to do. They're also wired to cooperate, and are not easily rattled by a rider's unbalanced seat or sudden movements.

The Ultimate All-Rounder

This unique blend of mental composure, sound work ethic, and athletic brilliance makes the Australian Stock Horse a stand-out. They have the ability to switch gears effortlessly between entirely different disci-

plines. One moment they might be working cattle with explosive speed, and the next they're gliding through a dressage test with absolute calmness.

The modern breed is the living embodiment of that colonial survival story. They took the best of the world's hardest bloodlines and refined them into the ultimate multi-tasker. When you ride an Australian Stock Horse, you're not just sitting on a versatile animal. You're riding several centuries of tough, resilient heritage.



About the author:

Janet Forster hails from sunny Perth in Western Australia. During a lifetime spent with horses, she has bred, competed, loved and written about them. She owns a collection of high percentage Tb cross-breds, most of which are palominos and registered Australian Stock Horses.





The Lesson You Only Teach Once

By Sarah Mitchell

Summer brings a steady stream of riders you will teach only once or twice. Treat that hour as its own lesson plan, and everyone leaves better for it.

In my years in the classroom, I learned early that a substitute-teacher day and a regular school day are not the same job, and you cannot run them the same way. The children are different, the goals are different, and the plan that works beautifully in October will fall apart if you hand it to a room you have never met. I think about that lesson every summer, because summer fills our barns with the riding equivalent of a room you have never met.

Your regular Tuesday student is off at the lake. In her place comes a different sort of rider altogether: the vacationing family who booked a lesson on a whim, the adult who rode as a girl and wants to know if it is still in there, the camp child you will have for four mornings and then never again. These riders are not your regulars, and the most common mistake I see good instructors make is teaching them as though they were.

Decide What Kind of Lesson It Is

Before I plan anything, I decide what the lesson actually needs to accomplish, and that answer changes completely depending on who is standing in the aisle. A one-time vacation rider does not need a curriculum. She needs a safe, genuinely happy hour that sends her home glad she came. A returning adult needs something quite different. He arrives half-certain his body has forgotten everything it ever knew, and my real task is to show him, gently, that it has not. The four-morning camp child needs an arc, small enough to finish inside the week but real enough to feel like true progress.

Three riders, three entirely different lesson plans. And the only way to know which one to teach is to ask before anyone is mounted. When did you last ride? What did you do then? What are you hoping for today? A minute of conversation at the crossties will keep you from teaching the wrong lesson to the right person, which is a mistake you do not get a second chance to correct when you only have them once.

“
A minute of conversation at the crossties keeps you from teaching the wrong lesson to the right person.
”

The Horse Is Half the Lesson Plan

I tell every newer instructor the same thing: for the one-time rider, horse selection is not a detail, it is half your lesson plan. This is not the hour to bring along a green horse or to hand your sensitive schoolmaster a project.

Your drop-in rider has no relationship with the animal, no muscle memory to steady them, and no way of knowing what is normal and what is not. Put them on the most forgiving horse in your barn, the veteran who has seen every flapping jacket and dropped rein and long ago concluded that none of it merits a reaction.

And match the horse to the rider's nerves, not to their ambitions. The gentleman who tells you he used to jump is, today, a man who has not sat on a horse in fifteen years. Believe his body, not his memory.

A nervous rider on a quiet horse can have a lovely hour. A nervous rider on a busy horse can have the sort of experience that ends their riding for good, and you will have been the one who arranged it.

Teach One Thing Properly

Here is where the clock does its damage. Knowing you will not see this person again, you feel the pull to cover everything, and so you cram in steering and stopping and posting and a little theory and a great deal of safety, and the rider leaves with a blur of half-heard instruction and nothing they can actually do. In the classroom we called this covering the material instead of teaching it, and it fools the teacher far more than it fools the student.

Choose one thing and teach it until they own it. For the vacation rider, it may be a balanced, independent walk-to-halt where she genuinely feels the horse answer her. For the returning adult, it may be finding his following seat at the trot again and the

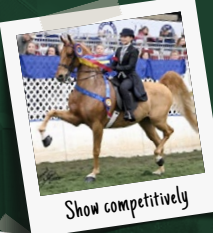
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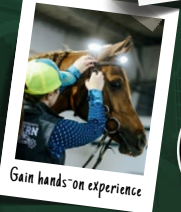
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grin that comes with it. For the camp child, it may be steering a clean figure-eight entirely on his own. One clear, achievable skill, taught to the point of real competence, is worth six skills sampled and forgotten. Send them home able to say I did this, not I had a go at a bit of everything.

Safety You Practice, Not Safety You Recite

Every drop-in rider needs the safety essentials, and I have never met one who wanted a speech. The way to teach safety in a single hour is to fold it into the doing, the same way a good teacher builds the fire drill into the term rather than lecturing about fires. Teach the emergency stop as a skill the rider practices, not a paragraph they nod through. Show them how to come off safely by having them think it through once, clearly, and then move on. Give them a steady, correct thing to do with their hands rather than a list of things not to do with them.

A rider who has practiced stopping is far safer than a rider who has merely been told



About the author:

Sarah Mitchell is a former middle school teacher who brings her love of education to equestrian writing. A lifelong rider with experience across multiple disciplines, she now writes about riding instruction and horse management. When she's not writing, you'll find her at the barn with her two horses. She lives in Virginia with too many barn cats.

about stopping, and she is enjoying herself while she learns it, which is rather the point.

Why the One-Time Rider Deserves Your Best

There is a practical reason to give these riders real care, beyond its simply being the right way to treat a guest in your barn. The drop-in rider is the finest advertisement your program has, and she is entirely unpaid. The vacation family goes home and tells the neighborhood about the wonderful lesson. The returning adult, handed back the feeling he came looking for, signs up for a winter series. The camp child campaigns for

lessons the whole drive home. None of that follows a forgettable, generic hour delivered by an instructor who was tired and reasoned that it hardly mattered because they were only here the once.

So teach the rider in front of you. Find out who they are, choose the right horse with real care, give them one true thing to carry home, and keep them safe without ever making them feel managed. Do that, and a single summer lesson does precisely the work you most need it to do. It quietly turns someone who only meant to try into someone who means to come back.



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... in which Cameo Miller stirs
her thoughts and ideas to
see what rises to the top.



BEING 100% PRESENT

By Cameo Miller

Illustration by Bethany Caskey

I'm probably biased, but I think one of the major benefits of ARIA membership is that you get this magazine which has helpful information, insights, tips, and knowledge from people who have been where you are, have gained a great deal of expertise from that, and are willing to share it all with you. No holding bits and pieces back so you'll hire them again; just giving you their best in every issue. Didi wrote a really good article in the March issue, and I would like to add some thoughts to it. I think we need to help our students do the same thing that she is suggesting we do for ourselves as instructors—be in the present moment with themselves and with their mounts.

We all know what it's like to be in that perfect place where there is nothing but us and our horse. Where we are so attune to each other that it does feel like that mythical centaur. Those moments require us to leave everything else elsewhere during that time. Maybe you have your students turn off their

cell phone during the lesson, but are they still thinking about what was on it as they walked in the door, or what they're going to do with it when the lesson is over? We may tell them to "leave it (whatever else is going on in their life) at the barn door", but how many of us help them to actually DO that. Do you have any idea if they are having trouble as school or home; things that are invading their thoughts because of what they just had to deal with or what they'll have to deal with when they leave the stable? Didi's article talks about the instructor being in the here and now, but our students can't truly connect with their horse and get the most out of their lesson if they are not 100% present too.

I don't think this is particularly applicable to young children, nor during the first few lessons as everyone is getting the basics down. But I do think it is something that can, and should, be addressed at some point. And I'm sure you have mentioned it a couple of times, but have you made a point of really focusing

on it as an important issue? Perhaps during a review meeting. This doesn't need to be "a lecture". Maybe you can share some of the methods you use to focus on lessons when your own life has multiple issues being thrown at you. There are a multitude of mindfulness practices available; perhaps make print-outs of ones you especially like to hand out as needed. Our students may need to be reminded that horses are prey animals and are, therefore, extremely attuned to tiny nuances through multiple sensory inputs. Especially from large controlling creatures on their backs. Yes, years of being around people, and being used by multiple people during multiple lessons, tempers this for our horses, but they still have ingrained instincts that they cannot help but react to. How can the student be attuned to their mount's response to what they're trying to tell it if they are not 100% present? It can be a disruptive cycle if the student is projecting difficult emotions, that the horse is picking up on and reacting to, which causes the student to become frustrated, which leads to the horse

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being even more reactive. A scenario that we have all had to deal with.

One idea is to have a progressive mindfulness exercise to implement each time they come for a lesson. As they're nearing the lesson venue, they bring to mind all the things that might interfere with paying attention during the lesson. When they reach the parking lot, they take a moment to consciously decide to think about those things later. When they enter the barn they take several long, deep breaths, letting go of those thoughts and any disruptive feelings. If they brush and tack the horse they will be riding, this is a good time to consciously focus on those tasks and connect with their mount. As they walk to the lesson itself, they think of what they worked on last time and their goals for this lesson. At some point in this routine they focus on connecting with their horse—how does it seem today—what might the horse need during the lesson. As they mount, it's one more long, deep breath to be fully present in the moment. Not only will this practice help during lesson time, it will be useful to them throughout their life with any multitude of situations that require the same release of intrusive thoughts and feelings and focused attention.

Another idea you could use during a review session that might help them understand all this is to have them think of an especially pleasant time when they felt completely happy. Help them to recognize how they were focused on some specifics of that situation and how sharp their memory of it is even all this time later. They were 100% present in that moment. Help them to understand that they need to be 100% present in lessons so that what they are learning will stay with them just as clearly. We all know that some of riding is achieving muscle memory, but correct muscle memory only happens if they are focused on what they are doing and how their horse is responding so they learn what they are doing correctly and what they need to change to get better results. Obviously not every lesson will result in centaur moments, but those of us who train horses as well as

students know how important it is to be fully attentive to our mount if we hope to achieve the desired results in any degree at all. The student needs to fully comprehend this too. It is not just the student in this lesson—the horse is too. And if the student is not fully present all the time, they may miss fleeting centaur moments that briefly occur during their rides. These moments are so special that they definitely should not be missed.

Once you have talked to students about this issue, it will be much easier to address it if you see a problem arise during a lesson. When their attention is wandering, when they are over or under responding to you or their horse, or, critically, if they are becoming overwrought. We've all had times when we've had to stop a lesson and help a student deal with strong emotions (fear, anger, frustration). This is much easier to do if you've already laid the ground work beforehand. Helping them get back to being at least 90% present during the lesson is easier if they already have an idea of what you're talking about and how to go about doing it. Reminding an over-

wrought student that the horse's poor performance is the horse being 100% present and is reacting to their rider will not be seen as being critical and not caring about what the student is upset about if it's a reminder rather than somewhat new information.

Those centaur moments don't happen by magic. Well, maybe sometimes they do. But mostly they happen because we have put in the work and the focus to allow them to happen. We need to be able to help our students learn how to develop this skill too. No matter how rare, those centaur moments will stay with them just as clearly and sharply and happily for the rest of their lives as whatever joyful memory they told you about before. If you are in the present moment, and are "teach(ing) the student in front of you", and the student is as close to 100% present as possible, some of that magic just may happen more often than not.

About the Author:
Cameo Miller is a Masters-level clinical psychologist and a Level IV ARIA Certified Instructor based in Michigan. She is a member of the ARIA Evaluation Panel and an ARIA National Test Center Administrator.

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