



Divide Horsemen's Association

Spring Edition Newsletter

April 2016

Here we are in the second quarter of 2016 already!! Unlike last year when we headed into another year of drought, this year we are captivated by all the greenery still amassing our beautiful foothills where we are fortunate to ride. We are looking forward to DHA's ranch tour in May, the Dru Bamer Fun Ride Memorial Day weekend and then comes the Horse Expo June 10-12.



So, it goes without saying, happy riding everyone!

President's Post

Happy Spring Everyone,

It takes all of the members to make a strong and vital club, so I am asking every club member to buy a ticket to our **Spring Barn and Horse Property Tour on Saturday, May 21**. This should be a wonderful afternoon event that you can share with friends and family. In addition to the ticket you purchase, I am also asking for each member to sell two more tickets to family, friends and neighbors.

The tour has something for everyone - from newborn foals to ooh and ah over, to equestrian themed art work and model tack rooms. Our last tour stop will be at the Viani Vineyards where we can visit and snack among the grapevines and see who wins the raffle prizes. I hope to see you all there. Fundraising allows our club to sponsor and donate to our community projects, specifically the Salmon Falls staging area and the Georgetown Divide Summer Youth Program. It also allows us to donate to emergency horse welfare projects such as our donation last year to the horse victims displaced by the Butte fire. If our treasury is healthy, we can offer more low cost clinics, play days and events. Most of us have working class incomes, but together we can make a rich impact on our community and promote equestrian welfare and lifestyle here on the Divide! Just what our mission statement says!!

As for the rest of the year, look for an obstacle play day, a group ride around the Olmstead trail, and our annual Holiday party (see calendar and check website for details). As always, you are always welcome at all board meetings (an hour before the regular monthly meetings), and it has been a pleasure to see so many members at our before-meeting potlucks! Keep up the good cooking! Wishing you all a safe and refreshing spring! See you on the trail! (Katie)

Divide Horsemen's Association's Mission Statement:

The objectives of the Divide Horsemen's Association are to establish, expand and protect new and existing equestrian and hiking trails on the Divide, to promote interest in horses and horsemanship, to aid and support activities concerning the welfare of horses, and to bring people together to share this common interest. DHA supports all trail users and in doing so, continues to support and preserve the rural lifestyle on the Divide.

2016 Calendar of Events

DHA's 2016 fundraiser: Barn/ranch tour on Saturday, May 21, watch for flyer; drawing for prizes; tickets \$25 or \$40 for two; for information contact Claudia at (530) 906-7604 or lzydsy1@gmail.com.

January 20 - general meeting: Mini wine tasting w/potluck. Membership forms available and folks encouraged to join or rejoin.

February 17 - general meeting with speaker from ARC (American River Conservancy) to talk about Salmon Falls trail connector, etc.

March 16 - general meeting: meet the trainers' night along with Lasagna dinner.

April 20 - general meeting with speaker from either Loomis Basin or CWDA (California Western Dressage Association).

May 18 - general meeting

May 21 - tour of local ranches/barns

June 15 - general meeting

June 18 - Obstacle clinic (location to be announced)

July 20 - general meeting at Hart to Hart Winery.

August 17 - general meeting at Katie's for pool/pizza party.

September 21 - general meeting - informal trail ride at Olmstead.

October 19 - general meeting with speaker from Loomis Basin.

November 16 - general meeting - turkey with all the fixings potluck.

December - holiday party - possibly a potluck plus band.

Check this out when you get an opportunity. Some of you may have already found the article about a new study, the Connected Horse Project. It's a groundbreaking pilot research program that will connect horses with people living with dementia and their care partners (www.connectedhorse.com). The Connected Horse Project is designed as three workshop days, including an introduction to the Stanford University Red Barn Equine Leadership Equestrian Center. There are also two days of working with the horses and trained facilitators as well as additional study requirements for people interested in participating on the pilot research project.

Remember, horses act as mirrors. They help us see our own emotions, fears and anxiety. They can help those living with dementia (and their care-givers too) experience joy and confidence. Those living with dementia do not have to be labeled by their diagnosis.

The project does need funding and donations are welcome. This is another meaningful program that focuses on what our treasured equines can do for us.

(Charlotte)

I added a new section where local trainers can share a training tip/article for our readers. We'll call section this our "The Trainer's Corner."

FROM THE TRAINER'S CORNER



From Russ Grossman's point of view: The key to riding, "Feel the horse move and move with the horse."

A Balanced Back-up by Marta Michilizzi

Asking a horse to reverse is just as important as asking him to go forward, yet sometimes people seem to overlook this essential equine skill under saddle.

Too often this is the scenario: The horse is backing up in a halting, braced manner. His nose is high in the air, his mouth gaping at the bit, his back hollowed and sprung. He resists his rider's request to back in nearly every passive aggressive way he can... some others, not so passively. Frustrating for the rider and not so fun for the horse either. It's a common problem, but one that is actually an easy remedy with a bit of patience and consistency.

Why is the horse acting this way? He's possibly been hauled on too roughly by the reins, or perhaps he's never been taught correctly how to reverse. Whatever the origins, he's now learned to be resistant by putting his body in a position (that high head and hollowed back) that makes it extremely difficult for the rider to make him back up.

First order of business is to get that head and neck down, so the horse can round his body and lift, rather than drop, his back and shift his weight over his hocks to enable his hind end. Only in this position can the horse back up smoothly and in a balanced manner. Let's forget going in reverse for just a little while and, at a standstill, ask the horse to drop his head and give to slight pressure on the reins. No see-sawing, hauling or jerking on the reins... just mild pressure. He may pull or shake or try to go higher, keep the pressure on until he gives in to your hands, even a little tiny bit. For any little bit of "give" the horse offers, release the pressure. If the horse raises his head again, resume your pressure until he gives. This is where the patience comes in. Continue with this request, each time the horse complies, release... but the next time, ask for just a little more than the last. If the horse gave slightly to rein pressure before, but did not drop his head at all, the next time, look for a tiny bit of head drop before release. Make it a game of understanding. You apply pressure, he gives to it. He learns from the release and will start hunting for that release as soon as he feels you apply pressure. This may take 10 times or 100 times, depending on the horse. Be consistent, keep cool and don't give up.

Once the horse is willingly giving to your hands (to the point you can have him put his nose down to his knee level with minimal pressure), you are ready to start asking him to back up. This may be 5 minutes after working the first stage or several days later, depending on your horse.

The game is the same. Ask your horse with gentle pressure to drop his head. When he complies, use your voice and leg cues normally designated for reverse. Keep asking for him to keep that head down with your hands and cue him to back up. If he drops his head lower and shifts his weight back even a little, release. Praise him and then ask again. This time we are looking for head down and rearward weight shift and a half or one step back. As soon as he complies, release and praise. Go for two steps back next time. I will generally quit a horse if he can take two good reverse steps with his head down with no resistance. The next time I work with him, we will go for four and five steps. It's a building block process.

(On a side note, if you are working with a horse that is untrained from the start, the same principals apply, but begin from the ground instead).

Once the horse has the idea that he'll quickly get a release from the pressure as long as he complies, you're home free. He'll happily give you a balanced back up because he knows that release is right around the corner if he gives. A balanced back up is the key to a correct and balanced stop. There's a lesson for another day. :)

"When life has you at the end of your rope... dally up and go left!"

(Marta)

Katie shares with us an essay she submitted for a contest, entitled "Real Simple Life Lessons"

Turning fifty was hard. My youngest left home to join the Navy, my older children moved to different states to pursue career opportunities, my mother was in end stage renal failure, and my marriage was struggling to survive without the glue of children to nurture and raise. My health began to deteriorate as I went through the changes of menopause and the exhaustion of a demanding full time job. So when my company offered early retirement I jumped on it. Which is how I had the time one lovely spring Wednesday afternoon to go to my friend Karen's riding lesson at a nearby ranch.

The moment we drove up the tree lined driveway and passed through the weathered gates of Willow Tree Ranch I was caught like a calf lassoed at branding time. I got out of the car and stood next by the shady pasture where three bay horses grazed. I don't know if it was the glossy horses clip-clomping up and down the barn aisle, or the tangy smell of leather and horse sweat—but I knew I had found something important—something I had been missing for a long time. I literally stopped and held on to the hitching rail as I soaked it all in.

A magnificent white horse stood tied in the barn breezeway. She stared at me and then turned her regal head to survey the parade of pigtailed girls filing past her as they headed to the arena with their horses. I couldn't take my eyes off her startling black and white face markings. One of her eyes was blue and I had the distinct feeling she was checking me out.

"Can you grab my saddle?" Karen called. I helped Karen saddle her lesson horse all the while stealing glances at the fairy tale white horse with the flowing white mane and tail. When we had curried and brushed Karen's horse to gleaming copper we put on the bridle, checked the cinch and headed to the arena to warm up. I was planning to watch from the bleachers but as we passed the white horse, she stomped her front foot and tossed her head impatiently—glaring at me.

"Why is the white horse not going?" I asked Anna, our instructor. Oh that's Sarah Bear. She's for sale. We just bathed and dipped her—someone is coming to look at her later." I hurried to catch up with Karen and as I turned to latch the gate Sara looked right at me and whinnied—and I heard her. "May I ride her?" I asked Anna.

I rode with Karen in the lesson—two middle aged matrons trying to keep up with a gaggle of twelve year old girls with spandex legs and seats of superglue. The girls trotted and loped circles and patterns while I walked around—perfectly content just to be on Sara's back and feel the power of her legs and back moving under me. The mare was listening to every whisper of my leg, every flick of my rein, every tilt of my seat. I was mesmerized. Towards the end of the lesson when I was really riding, we transitioned from the canter down to a trot. I lost my seat and tilted precariously out of my saddle. Sara swung her body under me—catching me and righting my balance before I toppled off and fell into the sandy arena. I rubbed her neck and thanked her. At the end of the lesson I rode out of the arena, tied up at the barn and immediately wrote out a check for the purchase of one eight year old paint mare named Check My Sabru-AKA Big Sara or SaraBear.

I have always loved horses and my earliest childhood dreams involved riding magnificent black stallions through endless misty meadows and wooded hills. But as I grew up in a residential San Francisco neighborhood all of my early

riding experience came from the merry-go-round at the San Francisco Zoo. I never wanted to get off those handsome carousel steeds and go see the monkeys and the lions as the other children did. When at age six I named and drew all the horses in the order of their placement on the merry-go-round my mom seriously thought they might have switched the babies at the hospital.

The horseback riding dream stayed a dream until I was a twelve and saved my babysitting money to ride the string horses at Pacifica Ocean Beach Stables. My cousin and I would take three busses from the Avenues down to Pacifica stables once a week to ride the horses along the beach. Our first "riding" lesson from the wrangler there consisted of one important sentence. "Stay on top of the horse but jump off when he goes down to roll in the sand." Only the most passionate equestrian could survive the harrowing rides of the string horses at the beach stables. But we never missed a week. Most rides we did have to jump off midway and then climb back on when the horse finished rolling in the sand. The good news is those savvy old horses really did wait for us to jump off before launching themselves into a rollicking sand scratch. The bad news was they knew to the nano second when the half hour mark of the ride was over and no amount of coaxing could get them to change their minds. No matter how hard we held the reins or kept our eyes forward or squeezed with our legs those horses would calmly and determinedly turn around and head back to the stables.

When I was fourteen I convinced my father's friend to let me ride and care for his aged gelding Red. Every morning I would ride my bike two miles to feed and water Red. I spent long summer afternoons brushing him until his coat gleamed and braiding his mane with blue and teal ribbon. I taught him to bow for a carrot. I rode him bareback and bridleless every day around his two acre pasture and down to the nearby creek and back. Every ride was an adventure through an enchanted forest for me and I never missed a day. But when the summer ended and we went back to the city that was the last time I got to ride my dream. High school, college, marriage, a career and kids all filled my life and my dream was lovingly wrapped in golden tissue paper and saved in a small corner of my heart until I stepped onto Willow Tree Ranch and saw Sara.

Of course, buying a horse is not all romance and roses. I had to find stable arrangements, get a hay supplier, learn horse husbandry at a fast and furious pace, and take horsemanship clinics to improve my own rusty riding skills, which were still commensurate with the cantankerous string horses at Pacifica stables. I found a boarding ranch near my house with direct trail access. It was here that I also found Gail and her champion show horse Sax Sun Bar. Gail was an avid and accomplished equestrian who became my steady riding partner and best friend. We rode the Sierra Nevada trails almost every day, discovering a hillside of daffodils naturalized by early ranchers, hidden trails overlooking Folsom Lake, and secret springs surrounded by Indian grinding stones.

When Gail had to stop riding and Sara developed a chronic lameness I put my faithful mare on pasture rest, bought another horse and continued riding and making new equestrian friends. I learned how to manage a horse ranch, trim my horse's hooves, horse camp in the high country, cut a cow out of a herd and ride a fifty mile race. Eventually I was elected president of the local riding club. I started writing a column for a local newspaper chronicling the special and sometimes hilarious challenges of senior riding. My monthly column was so well received that I wrote a fiction book loosely based on the shenanigans of my horse community. It's not on the best seller list but I have sold many copies to the local community and am now working on my next book.

Every day I wake at dawn and take my coffee out to the barn to feed my horses and watch the sunrise before doing never ending chores that come with a big ranch. After chores I write for an hour, then saddle up and ride the trails behind my house. As I ride out of my barn and head to the trail, I see a magnificent white horse grazing in the corner of the pasture. Sara raises her head and whinnies to me as I head out the gate. I smile and I listen... and I hear her.

(Katie)

Here is an article from a couple years ago that I think is worth repeating, entitled "Have A Great Ride Every Day!"

Do you want to know how to have a great ride everyday? Stop expecting perfection. Rather than looking at training and competing in black or white terms, learn to see things in "shades of gray."

The key to seeing shades of gray is to recognize when things are just "a little bit better." For example, when you think of your ride, ask yourself if:

- Were your hands a little quieter?
- Did you sit a bit more centered today?
- Did you keep your eyes up for more of your ride than you did yesterday?
- Were you able to use your legs, hands or seat a bit more independently? That is, when you used your legs, did your hands stay somewhat quieter than last week?
- Did you remember to use your legs before your hands more often?
- Did you control your emotions a bit better so that you were more relaxed, patient, brave, or calm?
- Did you stay slightly more focused throughout your ride?
- Did you remember to breathe more often?
- Did you reward your horse for every effort he made that was a bit closer to what you want as a finished product?

As long as things keep getting "a little bit better," pretty soon you'll be riding "a whole lot better." (Jane Savoie)

Here's an interesting article from the Horse.com, entitled "Group or Individual Horse Housing: Which is Less Stressful"

We're getting the message now. Horses don't like being separated from other horses. And as the research pours in, we're finding more and more support for that idea. Case in point: British researchers have confirmed that horses tend to show more physiological signs of stress when they're housed in individual stalls, whether they act like it or not.

"The physiological changes we saw in our study horses cannot be masked in the same way that a horse can mask behavior (a survival mechanism in a prey species)," said Kelly Yamell, PhD, researcher at Nottingham Trent University, in Nottingham, U.K. "And unfortunately, in the most isolated housing (individual box stalls), adrenal activity was very high (which can result in high levels of cortisol, the "stress hormone," being released). If very high levels of cortisol are present chronically or on a highly repetitive basis, then this can be detrimental for our horses' health."

In their study, Yamell and her colleagues tested fecal cortisol levels, eye temperature, and behavior during handling in 16 university lesson horses housed in four environments:

- Individual box stalls with no physical contact;
- Individual box stalls with limited physical contact;
- Group stalls housing two horses together; and
- Group pens housing several horses together.

All horses were on a break from lessons during the summer and were kept in a pasture before the experiment began. They had, however, all been introduced and were accustomed to each kind of housing situation before the study

began, so nothing was new. When the researchers brought the horses into the stables for the experiment (each horse got to test each situation for five days), they were careful to bring in all the horses at about the same time so they didn't experience stress from just getting left out of the larger herd, Yamell said.

By far, the horses showed the highest levels of fecal cortisol when housed in individual box stalls with no physical contact with other horses, she said. Although they could see each other over their respective barn doors if they were looking over at the same time and could hear each other, they were otherwise completely isolated, as is common in many stables.

By contrast, horses in the group housing situation had the lowest eye temperatures (indicating the lowest stress levels) and were easier to handle than the horses in the other housing situations, Yamell added.

Individual stabling systems have developed partially out of convenience and partially out of a mistaken understanding of what's comfortable for a horse, she said. Through anthropomorphism (attributing human feelings and ideas to horses), people have often thought that their horses would be "happier" in a barn with their own personal space. And while that kind of stabling has some real benefits—such as protection from predators or conflict-related injuries and shelter from bad weather—it can also lead to unhealthy stress levels.

"If you consider this logically, taking the horses' evolution into consideration, then you must think about how these animals have lived for millions of years, on wide open areas with room to roam in social groups, trickle feeding as they moved and as their physiology is designed to do," Yamell said. "Stabling is the opposite: isolation, reduced space, and limited food. These disadvantages can all contribute to elevated anxiety and reduced welfare for a social, free-ranging prey species."

While many owners would be quick to agree with this concept, others have argued that, actually, their horses prefer their individual stalls to being outdoors with other horses, Yamell told *The Horse*. "Since my scientific paper was published, I've had many owners comment that their horse waits at the gate to be brought into his stable," she said. "I think it's more likely the horse is waiting at the gate for his dinner! However, I accept that there may be exceptions."

But, on the whole, even if current individual-stall stabling systems aren't ideal, it's not a reason to wrack ourselves with guilt, Yamell added. "I wouldn't say that it's cruel," she said. "I think there is a place for stabling our domestic and companion horses but perhaps not for extended periods due to the negative aspects."

"My recommendations would be that horse owners ensure that their horses have time to socialize or have contact with other horses and to move and feed wherever possible," Yamell said. "I'm not suggesting we all set our horses free, but there is a happy medium. Offering the opportunity for social interaction with conspecifics and the freedom to express natural behavior can improve equine welfare. And if there's a housing type available that facilitates this, then I would encourage it to be utilized."

Excerpts from Smartpak article, "Spring Horse Care Checklist"

Houses get a spring cleaning, cars get a spring tune-up . . . why shouldn't horses receive the same extra attention when the weather turns warm and their duties change? Make the most of the professionals available to you, and learn as much as you can about your horse and his individual needs.

Learn how to identify body condition score and weight tape your horse properly.

Determine if the type or amount of hay, grain and supplements you feed needs to change

Inspect your horse's skin, coat and hooves for poor quality or disease conditions

Discuss parasite control and submit a fecal sample

Learn what new diseases may be occurring in your area and request specific vaccinations (such as equine herpesvirus – 1)

With your veterinarian, examine your horse's mouth and develop a dental plan (have your vet or an equine dentist float the teeth if necessary)

Evaluate your horse's risk for conditions like colic, laminitis and ulcers by sharing turnout strategy: how much time will he been in a stall vs. turned out and will he have access to pasture

Find out if your horse may benefit from electrolytes, antioxidants, joint supplements or other products if you plan to travel or show

Whether you compete or just ride for fun, work with your trainer (if you have one) to design a training and conditioning program so that your horse is fit mentally and physically for his task. Incorporate your veterinarian's recommendations on proper conditioning, and remember that training is teaching your horse skills and conditioning is improving his flexibility, muscular strength and cardiovascular fitness. You need both programs to succeed and to keep your horse sound. In general, increase the intensity of your horse's work OR the length/time but not both at the same time. For example, if you have been walking your horse for 30 minutes a day during the winter, either walk for 25 minutes and trot for 5 minutes OR walk for 45 minutes.

Also from Smartpak, "Surviving the Spring Sillies"

I think we are all more than a little excited to be embracing the shining sun and slightly warmer weather that has been approaching. After many months of cold toes and muzzles, blanketing decisions, and furry horses, we are all happy for a little warmth in our life! Well I have news for you, we are not alone! I am sure you have all experienced this for yourself but your horse is just as excited for the warmer weather as you are. They have an extra spring in their step and they want nothing more than to celebrate.

Depending on your barn facility, how much conditioning you have been able to do over the winter varies. Most riders and horses in New England are limited to how much they can exercise in the frigid months. Even when you have an indoor, depending on your schedule it is hard to fit in a ride when you need to average in how long your horse needs to cool before he can eat or so you blanket him without him overheating but also do not want him to get a chill. I am sure these are all factors we have struggled with throughout the season. Therefore if your horse maybe did not get quite as much ride time as you would like, then it is important to condition him before starting right into a rigid work schedule when you are both excited about the longer days with sunlight and warmer temperatures.

Now I know that as the weather gets really warm our horses can tend to get on the lazy and lethargic side and enjoy long wonderful naps in the sun. However, there is a little time in between where the weather gets warmer but it definitely does not make the horses lethargic by any means, in fact it does the opposite. This is what I like to call the "Spring Sillies". Like I said earlier, the horses have a little pep in their step and they are feeling just as excited as you are about the wonderful feeling of spring!

It is important that you slowly work your horse up to really letting loose with all of their excitement and energy so that you can keep yourself safe and your horse from injuring himself after a winter of maybe not riding quite as much and his muscles from being in quite as good of shape as they were before. For a horse that is particularly excited about the fun new weather, I like to start my rides with a lot of transitions. This helps keep the horse focused on you and what you are asking rather than "Hey, I am so excited to be outside in this good footing that I just want to kick up my heels up and go, go, go!" In addition to lots of transitions, it is also great to put a lot of changes in direction in there as well to really help keep their concentration on you and what you would like them to do as appose to what they would like to do. If your horse is a little too excited to concentrate on transitions and changing of direction and you just really can't get their attention, it is always a safe idea to start out with some "controlled" lunging so that they can get these sillies out before you get on their back.

The beginning of spring is such a wonderful time. I'm very lucky to have an indoor at my barn and was able to continue to ride during the cold winter, but there is nothing like the feeling of a nice ride outdoors after being inside all season. I think if you asked my horse he would agree with you as well. There is something about the spring air that just puts you in good spirits and makes for a very enjoyable ride, provided you start slow and stay safe. I hope these tips are able to help a bit when the spring sillies come out, now go out and have a great ride!

Just for thought:

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful persons with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated failures. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.
(Calvin Coolidge)

Here is a repeat article from last spring. I thought you might enjoy the additional reading.

Classical Riding for Every Equestrian



Western Dressage is taking the nation by storm! It is now recognized by the USEF and is becoming a popular choice in competitions and at home as a method of progressive training.

Western Dressage is all about classical horsemanship as a foundation for any discipline and is designed to help western riders learn to use the training scale to provide a step-by-step progression for training and relationship building.

Whether you are a pleasure rider, jumper, barrel racer, or trail rider, Western Dressage promotes long-term soundness and enhances the relationship between horse and rider.

Western Dressage is not just another class to enter, not just another skill to learn. Western Dressage is bringing the English and Western worlds together through the time-tested methods of Classical Dressage.

Whether we ride in a Stetson or Breeches, whether we work to perfect the shoulder-in or sliding stop, we can all benefit from teaching our horses to carry themselves in a more balanced fashion.

Western Dressage can be done by every horse regardless of breed, color, sex, size, talent, or level of training.

- It requires no special equipment nor a lot of money
- Western Dressage builds confidence and will help you become a better rider

- Western Dressage builds muscle-tone and will make your horse stronger and healthier

The definition of "dressage" is merely "training". What horse can't benefit from better training? The lower level concepts of Western Dressage will help improve a horse's performance for every discipline. As you advance, you may choose to make Western Dressage your primary discipline or move on to another sport.

Be sure to mark your calendar for the third Wednesday of the month and join us at 6:30 p.m. at the Greenwood Community Center for the DHA meeting/potluck!

2016 Board of Directors:

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