SADDLEBREDS WITH SECOND CAREERS: AN ALBUM OF ATHLETIC HORSES WITH HAPPY OWNERS

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SECTION ONE: A-E

INTRODUCTION

This set of four .pdf documents has been compiled from contributions, including sire/dam, photos, and in some cases brief text, sent in to EQUUS Magazine by owners of American Saddlebred horses. Where possible, I have expanded the pedigree information; those who own Saddlebreds in sporthorse or alternative disciplines will likely be surprised and pleased to find closely related horses reported here. Those who may be thinking of purchasing a Saddlebred for non-traditonal use can refer to the pedigree information, as well as the photos, to get some idea of what bloodlines to look for.

Readers have been outstandingly generous, I think largely because they are so pleased with their Saddlebred horses that they are eager to share with others. We had room to print two articles featuring sixteen horses belonging to a dozen owners, but this represents only a fraction of all the owners (over eighty) and all the horse photos they sent in (over 400). In an effort to thank and acknowledge everybody -- and to give all of our readers a chance to appreciate Saddlebreds as sporthorses and in a wide variety of other non-traditional disciplines, we have created these documents as downloadable .pdf's.

Images and stories are organized in alphabetical order by owner's last name. Section One covers A-E, Section Two F-L, Section Three M-R and Section Four S-Z. In most cases, owners sent more than one photo of sufficient quality and interest, and I have been especially pleased to show that "second career" Saddlebreds often wind up doing more than one kind of job for their owners and families.

Some of the photos portray the horses in various types of competition, i.e. dressage, eventing, field hunting, arena trail, or endurance. In a few cases I have included the saddle-seat classes that are traditional for Saddlebreds, particularly when the photo demonstrates that the horse is performing not only well but comfortably. I am also interested in showing images of Saddlebreds performing either slow-gait or rack, because these gaits remain unfamiliar to many people outside the gaited horse world. There is no reason to be afraid of purchasing a Saddlebred horse that is capable of racking or other so-called "lateral gaits"; quite the opposite, because very often these horses show a high degree of excellence over fences and can be trained and conditioned to bring out a correct and powerful trot. On top of that, the Saddlebred canter is a little-known secret: with proper schooling, it commonly emerges as long-striding and elastic -- a complete delight both to ride and to look at.

The American Saddlebred has distinctive conformation. You will chuckle when you look at Carine Cardisco's photo of herself and her horse Sky, dressed up as an African safari for a costume class, her long-necked mount fulfilling the role of giraffe. Yes, Saddlebreds are often tall and they do usually have rather long necks, and sometimes a longer back to go with it. They are frequently criticized -- nowadays -- for being narrow-chested, i.e. "both front legs coming out the same hole". Crooked forelimbs and an overall excessive fineness amounting to fragility or weediness, rightly disqualifies some Saddlebreds from consideration for sporthorse disciplines. These criticisms, however, by no means apply to all -- as



Tucker, a Saddlebred gelding belonging to Lesli McNamara. This horse is probably retired, and what a beautiful situation Lesli has provided for him. I have to agree with John Fire (Lame Deer), a Lakota shaman, who says “horses make any landscape more beautiful.”

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these documents prove. Saddlebreds tend to have a tremendously wide, strong loin coupling, and this will be apparent even when first purchased, when the animal may have a rough, tight, angular topline. As far as conformation goes, the prospective buyer must look below the surface and see the underlying bone structure.

You should also get to know the individual “personality”: Saddlebreds bring high intelligence, great capacity for focus, and ready trainability unmatched in my experience by any other breed. They typically bring a great work ethic and will try very hard to please. Physiologically, many retain the toughness and stamina that once characterized the breed as a whole; 19th-century five-gaited championships, for example, were held outdoors because they commonly took two hours or more to win.

Almost by definition, second-career horses require thoughtful and sometimes rather specialized programs of re-training. This should not discourage anyone thinking of taking on a Saddlebred. There is nothing new about re-training for a second career and the techniques are certainly well known when the animal is a Thoroughbred racehorse and the new career is to be in field hunting or hunter-jumper competition. Ex-racehorses have to learn many basics -- for example, not to

accellerate when the reins are tightened, standard aids of the leg and seat, and how to make "down" transitions. It is no different with the Saddlebred ex-show horse; the only difference is in figuring out what particular lessons or exercises the individual animal needs in order to become confident and to develop his full physical capabilities. Special needs of Saddlebreds typically include work over cavalletti (to strengthen "core" muscles and stretch over the topline) and arena figures that teach lateral bending. Many Saddlebreds have outstanding ability for lateral work.

Most Saddlebreds that are substantial enough for sporthorse use make very good jumpers. Nobody ever doubted that they could get their knees up! But they're smart and careful too, and that makes them "allergic to wood", a factor often necessary to winning in Jumper competition -- but which can also be lifesaving during cross-country jumping. Ground poles, cavalletti, and jump gymnastics produce rapid improvement in the horse's apparent conformation, sometimes to a degree that makes "before" and "after" images almost unrecognizable as the same horse. I've helped several owners recondition their Saddlebreds and can definitely state that these changes are most gratifying, not only to the owner and to me as coach, but to the horse since the straight carriage and "core" fitness gained can prevent and even eliminate sorefootedness, muscle soreness, and chronic "offness". The physical changes I have described above are important, but I think they pale in significance to the improvement in the quality of the horse-human relationship that occurs as the horse loses stiffness and tension.

SOME REMARKS ON THE PROCESS OF RE-TRAINING

Many times, the Saddlebred that takes up a second career is -- for whatever reason -- one that is no longer wanted by its original owners. The business of "rescuing" horses is a hobby for many kind-hearted people these days, and it is do-able and fun so long as the person or family that adopts the horse holds out no expectations for success in any type of competition. Further, they need to have some horsemanship skills; I have known not one, but numerous cases where naïve new owners got hurt because they were too inexperienced to be able to "read" the horse -- to tell what he intends to do before he does it, which is the true basis for safety around horses. A rescue is definitely not a "cheap" way to buy a competition prospect, because the animal's history of training and use are usually unknown, and dangerous propensities are often not uncovered until the horse suddenly and unexpectedly hurts somebody.

Horses adopted when starving and neglected are often so damaged by parasites, neglected hoofs and teeth, injuries, disease, and loss of muscle mass that rehabilitation may take a long time. However, proper feeding and deworming along with attention from the veterinarian, farrier, and equine dentist can produce a remarkable turnaround. A point may be reached fairly soon when it becomes possible, and even a good idea from a therapeutic standpoint, to ride the horse. Before that can happen, however, I would advise thorough "testing" -- by close observation and to a degree by trial and error -- so as to revel how much the horse knows about aids as well as to uncover dangerous propensities such as panicking in a stall, charging while being led through gates, bashing into the handler, pulling back while tied, rearing, biting, striking, kicking, etc. My own policy with a new horse -- whether it is a rescue or any other type of purchase -- is to involve the animal in a course of ground-schooling which allows me to observe his talents and reactions while teaching certain very important skills, listed



My 3/4-Saddlebred gelding Painty Horse focuses on me intently. This is how things can eventually come to look; halter and lead are no longer necessary. I have carrots as reward, but the horse wants to be with me even more than he wants the carrots.

below in the order in which they should be learned. It is very unwise -- and also very hard on the horse -- to try to proceed to Step Two before Step One has been thoroughly mastered.

SIX STEPS TO SAFETY AND SUCCESS

1. The horse must learn to give me undivided attention for at least eight running seconds. This is taught in the halter with a long lead rope. Many horses feel a need to constantly check the environment for signs of danger or call to herdmates; or they try to leave. Practice is required before the animal can pay attention long enough to learn anything; eight seconds represents the critical minimum. One vastly useful result of this practice is that the horse will find itself getting interested in what seems to interest me, and will eventually come to regard my priorities as more important than its own.

To increase attention span, I first get the animal to look at me by a tug on the lead rope, at the same time perhaps quietly speaking its name. So lng as the horse continues to hold me in its regard, I make no demands through the lead line and often, croon to him in the same sort of chuckling hum that horses use: “ahh-ah-ah-ah”. On the other hand, the moment the horse looks anywhere but at me, I immediately bring his eyes back by however sharp a tug on the line is required. The initial lesson should last no more than five minutes, during which the horse will probably require many reminders to pay attention only to me. Then we take a break -- pet, rub and praise him or go hand-graze. After that comes another five-minute

lesson. On the first day, this can be repeated four or five times. The next day, we do the same again. You will notice that the number of reminders needed quickly becomes less while the number of seconds that the horse can pay attention steadily becomes greater.

Every grade-school teacher knows that children who pay attention to her and look toward her and the blackboard will be those who learn lessons quickest, and this is equally true of horses. The ability to pay attention to the handler -- the teacher -- is the foundation for both calmness and obedience. I would not want to try to mount, much less go on a trailride with a new horse, until I had this rule of operation and cooperation thoroughly installed.

2. The horse must learn to allow me to touch and handle any part of its body. My ultimate goal is that he should not only allow it but enjoy it. I first approach a new horse as another horse would -- obliquely from the front, angling in toward the shoulder. With very soft fingers, I first stroke the sides of the jowls (not the end of its nose), then the cheeks, then the neck and shoulders, gradually working all the way back on the left side of its body to the hindquarters and down the hind leg all the way to the hoof. If at any moment the horse tightens up or I hear its breathing change or stop, I stop my progress and softly retreat to the last place the horse was comfortable with having me touch. I then work my way toward the “fearful” bodypart again, rubbing it briefly and then retreating for a time into a “safe” patch of hide.

If while I am touching and rubbing on him the horse starts to walk, I stop and with a shake on the lead line or a brief tug, remind him to stand still again. This is repreated on both sides equally. It may take many short sessions over the course of weeks for the horse to become OK with being handled on all bodyparts and with having me brush, rub, or handle any patch of its skin.

During these sessions I make sure to handle the animal’s ears and tail. The tail is lifted and gently moved left and right until it totally relaxes, then lifted straight up and curled over the horse’s back Finally it is lifted and curled over his back and moved left and right like a windshield-wiper. Eventually I will run a soft rope or a towel up under the tail and lift the tail with that; I also do this from the saddle after I eventually mount -- giant help in forestalling any tendency for the horse to “grab up” behind and either buck or bolt.

Likewise I touch and rub (not pinch) each cannon bone, tendon, and pastern. While working with forefeet I may gently bump my shoulder against the horse’s shoulder, to help him shift his weight off of that limb. This generally results in the horse wanting to pick up that foot himself. Ditto with the hip and the hind feet; getting the horse to shift its weight onto the opposite foot makes lifting the first foot easy for him. I never pull or yank the feet up by the hairs of the fetlock; I let him show me that he can pick them up. When he does, I cradle the leg, rub the tendons, perhaps tap the sole a time or two, and then set it down. If at any point I feel the animal tighten up -- try to take its tail or its hoof away from me -- I simply release it to him, and the next time, I am careful to release it before he feels any need to take it away from me. His ability to balance on three legs and to trust me around his hindquarters thus gradually increase.

My Rocky Mountain gelding Oliver enjoying a good rub on that itchy spot behind the withers. Handlers must lose all fear of working close to the horse's body. Any jumpiness on your part will translate into suspiciousness and nervousness on the horse's part.

For safety's sake, all initial work should be on the halter, but the goal is what you see here: the horse stays put because he chooses to; because he'd rather be with the person than anywhere else.



The master-objective of this lesson is to create conditions where the horse feels safe and confident in giving me control of his body. Eventually doing this will become not only a habit, but the horse's own idea.

3. The horse must learn to respect my space -- absolutely. This is the foundation of "manners". I never stretch my arm out stiffly, as I often see people do, to poke the horse with my fingers in order to keep it away from me. Trying to control the animal this way is ineffective and can result in the handler getting her collarbone broken. Instead, I teach the horse to maintain a respectful distance at all times and under all circumstances, so that there is no possibility of his crashing into me.

This is taught by first having the horse stand quietly at the other end of the lead line. There needs to be at least four or five feet of space between the horse and me. Horses that want to crowd up close do that only because that's what they're used to, but it is easy to teach them to step back by creating a "hassle" in front of their nose every time they try to crowd in or bump or push the handler with their nose. Create the "hassle" either with a flag (a short whipstock with a rag tied to the distal end), or else by use of the lead line (wiggling it or flipping the belly of the line toward the horse, so that it lightly slaps him under the chin or on the jowl). Do NOT use a whip against the chest -- or any sharp aid -- because this can quickly lead to rearing and/or striking. If



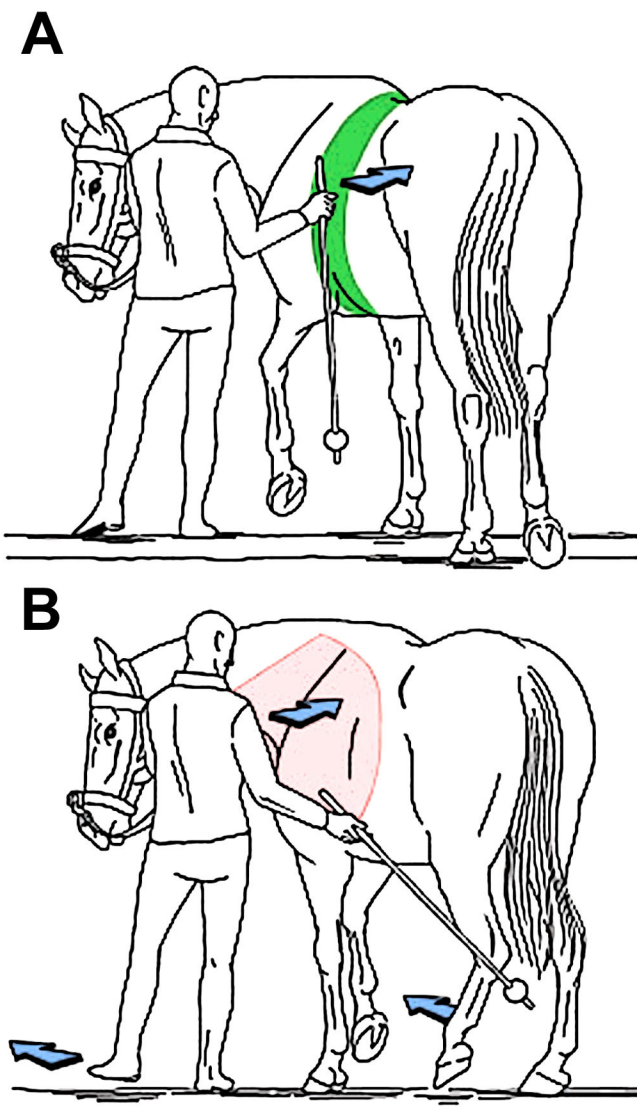
Cradling the foot which Oliver has just lifted for me. This photo shows our homemade circus drum, a sturdy and slip-proof platform that will hold over a thousand pounds without danger of tipping or collapsing. In every photo, notice all the "toys" scattered about the arena; in our school, toys are just as helpful and necessary as the roundpen, cavalletti, or jumping grids.

you're gentle but persistent, the horse will get the idea to stop his FEET as soon as the "hassle" starts. If he stops but does not then offer to step back, I help him do that by stepping up to him, grasping the halter, and gently pushing his head obliquely away from me so as to get him to unweight the near forefoot. When I see the knee of this leg break, I shift to pushing straight back, and the horse will then find it easy to swing the unweighted limb back. While continuing to face him, after he steps back I also step back, increasing the distance between us. Gradually over a period of days this increases until it equals the length of the lead rope.

In the next phase of this lesson, I call the horse forward to me and spend time petting him. Then I wiggle the lead rope to have him step back into the space which he originally occupied. Next I do the opposite: I approach him and rub or scratch him gently on the side of the neck or up under the mane. I then retreat to "my" space out in front of him, at the other end of the lead line. If the horse tries to follow me I send him back into "his" space with a flip of the flag or lead rope. The essence of the message to the horse is: I can approach and touch any part of its body, at any time, so long as it is with kindness and respect. However, he is not permitted to approach or touch me (enter my personal space) unless specifically invited. The ultimate result is a horse that, when being led from the left side and a car backfires to his right, may "spook in place" but will not jump on me.

4. The horse must learn to untrack (step obliquely under its belly with the inside hind leg), which represents the animal's learning how to accept and yield to what will ultimately become leg aids. The control of the hindquarters that this lesson gives -- not the bit -- is the true basis for physical control of the horse.

Untracking is taught on the halter with the flag or else an old, soft, floppy whipstock with no lash. The flag or whipstock acts to extend the length of the handler's arm; the soft rag imitates the caressing hand I previously used to teach the horse to enjoy having me handle its legs. Sharp whips and hard sticks are always counterproductive; light but definite touches are all that are normally needed. Touch the horse and then softly remove the flag as soon as the animal looks like he may move the hind foot as requested. If he does not actually move it, just repeat the aid and he will soon comply. DO NOT ask for multiple steps; one step equals compliance. You are not trying to teach the horse to turn around in place or do any other sort of maneuver, but merely teaching him to lift and move the inside hind leg as requested. The step should be slow and deliberate. Eventually you can move on to having him take two or three untracking steps, but remember, they are always to be INDIVIDUAL steps -- one, one, one, and then softly stop. Some horses that have been mis-taught this lesson will take multiple rapid steps, almost "fleeing in a circle"; if this happens, stop him, go to his head and talk to him softly, and then gently begin again, conveying that you only want one single step. Since the horse's dam taught him to untrack the day he was born, it is not difficult to convince him that the human handler knows all about it, too. In psychological terms, in the horse's



Teaching the horse to untrack upon request. Here the horse is tacked up with longeing cavesson. There is no important difference between traditional European work "on the short rein" and work in a rope halter with 8-foot lead rope. In view A, the horse is encouraged to walk forward while keeping its attention focused on the handler. The handler should always position herself at or behind the green belt, never in front of it (unless she wants the horse to stop). In view B, she lightly taps the inside hock, and might at another moment softly touch the ribcage or haunches with the side of the whipstock. The ball-ended whip is an excellent alternative to a floppy, lashless whipstock or a flag; which you choose will depend upon your horse's responses.

mind to untrack softly, one step at a time as I have described, is to submit and to prepare to obey.

5. The horse must allow me to twirl its head (yield to sideways motion at the poll joint, such that it causes the inside jowl to tuck under the throat; see illustration on previous page). In this motion, the animal's eyes and the tips of its ears remain level. Head-twirling is a modification of François Baucher's "jaw flexions", which provoke reflexive release of tension or "bracing" in the muscles that overpass the poll and other nearby muscles. This is tantamount to teaching the horse to bridle, that is, to take what the French term a proper "appuy" or elastic feel of the rider's hand. When bracing in the poll, jaws, tongue and neck are (as Baucher put it) annihilated, control of the hindquarters becomes possible. Thus, untracking and head-twirling represent two sides of the same coin.

6. The horse must learn to place its forefeet where I indicate, not only as a way to inculcate obedience, but more importantly so as to make sure that the animal is fully aware of where its forefeet are. This may seem odd, but many horses







Blocking must be as firm as whatever the horse offers. When he softens -- when his eye softens, as it has in view C above -- then softly remove your hands, rub, pet, and praise. In a few minutes, repeat; the horse will soon release his head almost immediately, so that it feels as if it is on ball bearings.

Here I twirl a gelding's head manually. It can also be done in longeing cavesson or halter, and will certainly be done later from the saddle in snaffle bit. Twirling involves ZERO tilting. Neither is it to be a demonstration of how far around the horse can bend its head or neck. The technique is not intended as any type of stretch, but rather acts upon neuromuscular reflexes to cause the animal to release any brace he may be holding in the muscles that overpass the poll, along the crest of the neck, and in the pharynx and tongue. My touch is gentle but not tentative. The palm of the right hand pushes the jowl, while the softly curled fingers of the left hand act to BLOCK any effort the horse may make to turn its head to the right.



With the great Tom Dorrance in central California about 1993. Painty Horse and I had many problems, among which was the fact that this extremely athletic horse was unable to be aware of where he was placing his feet. The tires, which have been split circumferentially to form flat rings. Tom helped us learn how to keep Painty's focus on putting his feet into the center of each ring, and to keep MY focus on helping him do that. (NOTE: NEVER step a horse into a tire that has not been split in this way). Many other "toys" can also be used to help focus; see text.

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lack confidence because they are unable to sufficiently realize what they're being asked to stand on or cross over. Their steps are short and hurried, with a trampling quality and the animal will carry its head rather high. It is as if he is moving in a fog. The teaching process which fixes this is lots of fun and utilizes various types of arena toys and equipment.

Generally speaking, I begin by teaching the horse to step on a sturdy plank, first with one forefoot, then with the other, then with both (one following after the other in whatever order I suggest). This is done with the horse at the opposite end of a long (7 or 8-foot) lead line. We then graduate to a "tall plank", i.e. a sturdy mounting platform, wide tree stump, or homemade circus drum, which requires the horse to shift its weight off of one forefoot in order to step up. In the course of things we will certainly learn to step over ground poles and low cavalletti, and to cross a tarp laid out flat on the ground, its corners weighed down with rocks. Like everything else, this is preparation for our first trail ride, when we may need to cross a stream by calmly sloshing through it rather than tensely trying to jump over it.

These apparently simple lessons are not annoying interruptions or frivolous wastes of time but are absolutely essential in creating horses that are safe, fun rides. They bear lifelong, daily practice -- practice to repletion. They open the door to success in whatever new job or form of competition is being contemplated. They are also deeply enjoyable, creating wonderful trust, affection, and rapport between handler and horse. Notice that they have NOTHING AT ALL to do with "desensitizing" or "de-spooking"; the horse's tendency to spook will drop to near zero simply as a side effect when you practice the lessons outlined above. The last thing on Earth that I would want to do is to desensitize my animal, because to "desensitize" means "to make numb." I don't want a numb horse; I want an alert, educated partner who consciously CHOOSES to be with me rather than anywhere else.

So much for preface. Below, please find a list of resources which relate to successful "ground schooling" and other preparatory lessons. True tales by happy American Saddlebred owners, photos and pedigrees begin on the next page. Good luck, have fun, and happy riding to you and your new best friend.

LIST OF RESOURCES FOR SUCCESS IN SCHOOLING AND RE-SCHOOLING

Bennett, Deb. "The Birdie Book". A book on CD-Rom. Obtain from www.equinestudies.org/book-store.

Bennett, Deb. 2008. "Mannering Your Horse". Two-CD audio lesson. Run time: two hours. $25 from www.equinestudies.org, click on "bookstore" then "audio CD's".

Bennett, Deb. 2009. "Birdie Basics". Two-CD audio lesson and discussion. Run time: two hours. This is "part two" to the above, available from same source.

Bennett, Deb. 2010. "The Anatomy of Straightness". Eclectic Horseman no. 53, pp. 17-22. Obtain from www.eclectichorseman.com.

Bennett, Deb. 2016. "Longeing: Why and How." Eclectic Horseman no. 91, pp. 5-13. Obtain from www.eclectichorseman.com

Boone, J. Allen. 1954. "Kinship With All Life". Harper, New York, 157 pp.

Brannaman, Buck. 1997. "The Little Red Book: The First Impression". Rancho Deluxe Design, Santa Ynez, CA. Obtain from www.eclectichorseman.com.

The Eclectic Classroom. Live "Zoom" classes on selected horsemanship topics, featuring Dr. Deb Bennett, Buck Brannaman, Gene Armstrong, and others who teach horsemanship. Sessions are $25 each and include the recorded session for review. During the post-lecture discussion, participants may ask questions on any topic.

Genadek, Dave. "About Saddle Fit." Free one-hour program on CD/Video. Obtain from www.aboutthehorse.com.

Schaffer, Mike. 2001. "Right from the Start: Create a Sane, Soft, Well-Balanced Horse". Trafalgar Square Books, North Pomfret, VT, 202 pp.

Swift, Sally. 1985. "Centered Riding." St. Martin's/Marek, New ork, 198 pp.

Leilah Abdullatif and Gus -- Registered name/pedigree not available



Leila tells me that the white stuff sticking to Gus's legs is just mud. The Saddlebred topline that appears rough and angular in the beginning will improve almost beyond recognition with proper conditioning.

Leilah's Gus exemplifies something I said in the introductory section: Saddlebred conformation often appears a bit rough at the beginning. The prospective buyer must just get used to this, and learn to look beyond the type of muscle development that training for the traditional saddleseat showring typically produces. Under the skin in this and many other cases, there is splendid bone structure.

Gus's hoofs need attention; of the four, the only one with close to normal morphology is the right hind. The dished toes tell me that a set of X-rays should be taken to determine whether the coffin bones in left fore and left hind have rotated out of position and whether there is evidence of laminitis. Once the antero-posterior unbalance in both forefeet is corrected, the upright pasterns will become less upright.

The photos of Leila and Gus jumping that appear on the next page, along with the jump gymnastics (work over cavalletti and grids of ground poles leading to series of low jumps) is excellent for encouraging bascule and strengthening core muscles (specifically, the rectus abdominis and iliopsoas which, along with longus colli, are the three most important muscles for producing collection). The long perivertebral muscles -- the left and right longissimus dorsi -- fill out not by contraction, but by the alternation of contraction and release. Because arena figures and lateral



work foster this, they are also crucial to the horse's continuing development. The jump photos show that Leila has also helped this horse to carry himself and his rider straight.

Straight carriage is fostered not only by physical means -- making sure, for example, to exercise the horse equally to the right and left hand -- but also by setting up situations in which the animal will focus out to the front. This is an extremely powerful tool and powerful insight: wherever the horse's focus is, its body will want to go, almost as if caught up in a sci-fi "tractor beam". See "Birdie Book" under the list of resources at the end of the Preface for more on how to put this to use in training and handling your horse.



Aiuto, Ami and Nuts in Vegas

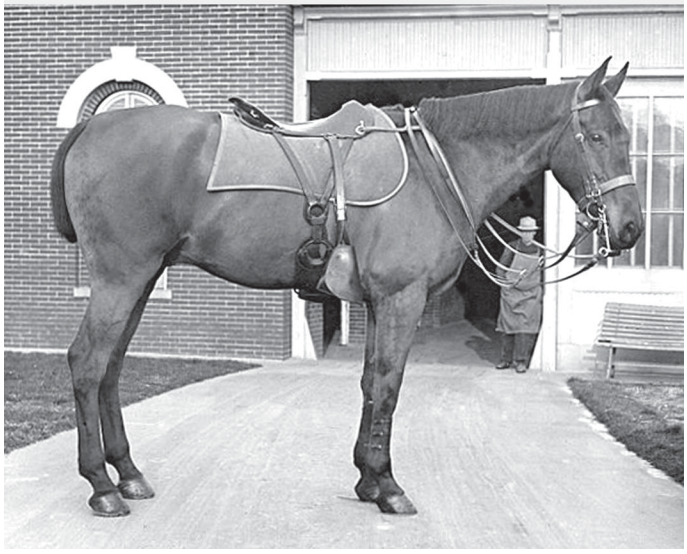


10 year old gelding by Mr. Las Vegas by Supreme Heir (Supreme Sultan/Valley View Supreme). He out of Beat the Odds by Attache (Wing Commander). Nuts in Vegas is out of Got Nuttin' on Me by Undulata's Nutcracker (Wing Commander). She out of Heir's Heiress (Supreme Sultan/Valley View Supreme). Tail Female: Edna May's King, Stonewall King, Chester Dare, Artist/King William, Messenger (TB/ Standardbred).

This gelding appears to have much smoother conformation than the previous, but the photo comes from a point later in his program of reconditioning. Look "beneath the skin" and you find very similar bone







President William Howard Taft was a lifelong athlete who suffered later in life from diabetes and obesity. Nonetheless he kept up the habit of a daily horseback ride. When Taft held lower office, he rode the mare below, a rugged draft-Thoroughbred cross over 16 hands in height. When he became President, it was thought she did not present an elegant enough appearance, and so Taft appealed to his friend Tom Bass, the famous Black trainer from Missouri, to find him a suitable mount. Bass selected the Saddlebred mare above because of her wide, strong coupling.

structure. Saddlebreds usually have beautiful necks, but equally often they have big, powerful hindquarters. Note the correct structure in the limbs, with large, well-formed knees and hocks. This horse's hoofs are not out of balance and the pasterns have normal rather than upright angulation.

There is something to be said here also concerning the heavyweight rider. The U.S. Army never packed a mule with more weight than 250 lbs., and I think that's a reasonable guideline. Another approach is to ask that rider plus tack not exceed 20% of the horse's weight. The rider's level of skill also counts for quite a lot; if the rider is both heavy and unbalanced it functionally lowers the weight limit. Very skillful riding can raise it a little. Ami appears to be an excellent rider and I am not worried that she is overburdening this horse.

This raises a last important point: Saddlebreds usually have a much stronger coupling than Thoroughbreds of similar height and weight. A strong loin coupling is broad, compact, and thickly covered with smooth muscling -- as you see in thie conformation photo of Nuts in Vegas, as well as in the historical photo above left.

Aschenbrenner, Kristin and Callaway's Come Rain, Come Shine



Western Pleasure competition in the Saddlebred show world is a different animal than among the Quarter Horses. It's a great division to be in if you like fancy tack and clothing, and the way of going prized allows the horse to move more freely, rounder, and with a greater degree of softness than in the Park and English Pleasure division. Kristin sent us no photos showing other types of use but this horse would probably also enjoy jumping or dressage. He's awfully pretty to look at.

The comments I in the previous section concerning the heavyweight rider also apply here. Note how broad-bodied Kristin's horse is, as much across the top of the loins as through the chest.

Gelding by Callaway's Cranston (Wing Commander), he out of Sweet Sachet by Genius Bourbon Prince (King's Genius). Callaway's Come Rain, Come Shine is out of Beckon the Day by Sultan's Great Day (Supreme Sultan/Valley View Supreme). She is out of Callaway's Becca by Will Shriver (Wing Commander). Tail Female: Wing Commander, Stonewall King, Rex Peavine/Rex McDonald, Edna May's King, Montgomery Chief.

Bane, Aggie and Reynolds Rap

17 year old grey gelding by a son of Worthy Son (Supreme Sultan/Valley View Supreme). Reynolds Rap is out of a mare by Carey's Night of Love by Night of Folly (Rex Peavine/Rex McDonald).

Bane, Aggie and Jammed Again

12 year old gelding by a son of Sultan's Santana (Supreme Sultan/Valley View Supreme), out of a mare by Sultan's Royalty (Supreme Sultan/Valley View Supreme). Conformation photos next page.

Aggie writes to say that her grey gelding Reynolds Rap has been one of the best field hunters she has ever owned. They also cub and trailride, of course, besides some arena schooling. In the photo below, Reynolds Rap is ridden by someone who bought him at the age of 17 to learn on, while Aggie rides Jammed Again. There is contentment and happiness written on everyone's face in that picture.





Note the look of alert concentration on the chestnut's face; the older and more experienced gray is minding him and Aggie as much as minding his job. Horses will often "come from the other side to help the rider out."



“Before” and “after” pictures of Aggie Bane’s gelding Jammed Again. The slab-sided, stiff neck and angular, shiny back in the top photo are typical of Saddlebreds who have been used in the show ring. A few seasons of arena figures, jump gymnastics, and actual hunting do wonders to change the horse’s apparent conformation.



Barron, Rachel and Its Just George

12 year old gelding by Delirium by My Magical Moment (Supreme Sultan/Valley View Supreme). He out of Attache's American Pie by Attache (Wing Commander). Its Just George is out of Paragon's Heart Light by Sultan's Paragon (Supreme Sultan/Valley View Supreme). Tail Female: unknown.

The photo captures Rachel and George clearing a very big cross-country jump. The horse is having no trouble at all, and Rachel writes to say that she and George have had an excellent string of wins in Three Day Event competition.

I have to add that I LOVE seeing NO tie-down or training fork in this most demanding phase of sport. Some people say these things help "in case the horse makes a mistake"; to me they get in the way of my ability to use the reins properly as well



Rachel Barron and her Saddlebred gelding George clear a jump during the Stadium competition.

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as preventing proper contact/connection between my hands and the horse's tongue.

George's form in front is exemplary and his power behind is more than adequate to propel the pair over the obstacle. In the photo on this page, the horse almost appears to be flying. Rachel did not supply a conformation photo but I think there's no doubt that it is excellent, with long, smooth topline and well-muscled pelvis and "britches". This horse represents a nice combination of power and elegance, with broad hocks and knees and sufficient bone substance, yet he is not ponderous. Such horses often succeed on the "big circuit" in jumping.



Black, Amber: It’s Your Thing, 15 year old mare. No available pedigree.

Every photo supplied to us by Amber shows her very talented mare clearing some sort of spread jump. There is little to say, except to note how careful with the hind feet the crossrail shot proves this mare to be. Saddlebreds are highly intelligent and quickly learn to be careful over the lumber.









Blinn, Casey and He's Magical (Hero)

17 hand gelding, 12 years old. By Waltenways Wild & Woolly by Star Imperial (Wing Commander). He out of Haute Mama by Black Bottom Pie (Wing Commander). He's Magical is out of Insignia by Yorktown Magic (Wing Commander). Tail Female: Stonewall King, Rex Peavine/Rex McDonald, Kalarama Rex, Lou Berry, Alexander's Abdallah (Standardbred), Black Hawk 1833 (Morgan), Khasnadger (Arabian), Saltram (Thoroughbred).

Casey and Hero were featured in print (EQUUS no. 517, "Built to Last"), and I reproduce the sidebar text here in full because it gives further detailed instructions bearing on the process of physical rehabilitation. The above are both "before" images, showing Hero's wonderfully substantial bone structure but also the ex-show horse's typically hypertonic, stiff, shiny back. The top photo was taken only a few months before the bottom one and great change had not yet occurred. As to pedigree, note Hero's very interesting tail-female. Like all horse breeds worldwide, Saddlebreds were created by outcrossing.



Casey Blinn aboard her Saddlebred gelding Hero.

We can assume by the cut of her saddle that Casey is interested in doing dressage or perhaps some eventing with Hero. She asks if this would be advisable or possible—or kind. I think it would be extremely kind, very advisable and certainly within the realm of possibility: but helping a horse who wants to drop his back as much as this one does takes dedication, patience and a knowledge of the appropriately therapeutic riding techniques.

Hero is an attractive horse with many conformational points in his favor. He has an excellent hindquarter with a fairly large and well-shaped pelvis. The bone substance is excellent, and the hocks, knees, and fetlocks are beautifully formed. I love long forearms on a horse, and he has those as well as the long thighs, long, steep arm and crisp shoulder typical of Saddlebreds.

Unfortunately, though, this horse—like many Saddlebred ex-showhorses —has acquired the habit of never going forward without first tightening his back. This is the main factor which causes him to hollow the topline— for it is contraction of the muscles OF the topline which cause a hollow back. Note that the horse wants to go continually high-headed; too erect carriage of the neck is a side effect of a tight topline.

The most important of all “schooling” activities is what I like to call “buddy-up time”. Let your horse show you how smart and creative he is, as Casey is doing here. When the schooling session starts to get “tough” -- that’s the signal that it’s time to take a break and go play.



Dinking around with different bits, using devices such as training forks or German reins or the like will not help, because they address the wrong end of the horse’s anatomy. What the horse does in front is always the result of what he does in the rear. Hero will never go properly to the bit, or be able to respond properly to the aids of leg and seat, until he learns to relax the perivertebral muscles that run along either side of the spine from withers to croup. When that is accomplished, he will be able to coil his loins and in the very moment that he gains this capability while under saddle, he will offer to go “long and low” in front all by himself, with no action on the rider’s part needed except to receive with sympathetic hands the elastic feel that he will then offer through the reins.

For Hero to round up and collect in the way Casey wants, she must teach him two things: first, that he can step forward without first tightening up, bracing the muscles of his back and those that overpass the poll. Once that is accomplished, she must then teach him to exert effort with the muscles of his abdomen and “core” to lift the center of the back. In short, contraction of muscles attached above the vertebral chain causes the back to hollow; contraction of muscles attached below the vertebral chain causes the back to round up.

Teaching the horse to relax his back before stepping forward is effected primarily through lateral bending at a walk. This at first means slow figures of eight—with an emphasis on having the circles that form the "8" perfectly round and of equal size. For a horse of about 15 hands, the diameter of the circles will initially need to be between 15 and 18 meters, depending on how stiff the horse actually is; as work progresses over a period of one to two years, the diameter should be progressively reduced down to 10, 8, or even 6 meters. Since Hero is fully 17 hands, he'll need to begin with 20-meter circles or even larger. When he becomes sufficiently supple, the horse will be able to perform perfect figure-8's at a trot and canter just as well as any Warmblood of the same height.

The aspect of figure 8's to pay most attention to is the step before X, the step at X, and the step just after X during which the horse changes the curve in his spine from left to right or vice-versa. At first this change will not feel at all smooth and the horse will have a noticeable preference for one spinal bend over the other. A major goal is to help the horse become able to change bends fluidly, so that he comes to the point where he does not mind whether he works to the right or to the left.

The connection between figure 8's and making the horse more laterally supple is obvious, but the connection between this and teaching him to go forward without tightening his back is more subtle. Realize that for the horse to flex enough to the left that he can smoothly create an 8 or 10-meter circle, he must release the perivertebral muscles that lie along the right side of his spine. If he can fluidly change from the left bend to the right, it implies that he can also switch from release on the right side of his body to release on the left. By the time he can do that, he has ipso facto learned to release the perivertebral muscles on both sides of the topline.

There are many variations on figure 8's, i.e. circles in the corner, along the sides, or in the center of the arena, and serpentines or daisy-chains. As work progresses, the rider will also find leg-yielding helpful; little zigzags from quarter-line to quarter-line are fun and this horse, like most Saddlebreds, will be good at them. Again, it is the change from leg yield from right to left to leg yield left to right which is of the most physiotherapeutic benefit to the horse.

The abdominal and "core" muscles that raise the back are primarily addressed through riding "up" and "down" transitions, again mostly at the walk. In my school, horses are taught to step back one-step-at-a-time as soon as they are supple and relaxed enough that a mistake while attempting to step back will not cause them to want to rear. This type of goal-less backing—"goal-less" because the rider is only asking for one step and then the next, not for the horse to go anywhere in a backwards direction—turns on the powerful "core" muscles (the ilio-psoas complex) whose contraction coils the loins.

Yes, I know: It all seems so simple, almost minimalist; but the exercises suggested above have worked wonders on many horses. For further ideas and to see these techniques in action, I suggest Mike Shaffer's book "Right from the Start" and his subsequent E-books that incorporate video clips.

I have two other suggestions for Casey. The first relates to the state of her own back. Casey has a typically feminine curvy figure. Unfortunately, this often goes with the rider having a tendency to sit too far forward on her crotch (sitting "on thefork") while also hollowing her own back.

Here Casey will find Sally Swift's classic books most helpful, and might also be able to arrange some sessions with a certified Sally Swift instructor who can help her learn the feel that comes when the rider's own perivertebrals are released, and what it feels like to sit properly upon the seat-bones. (See a reprint of my 1989 EQUUS article on this subject entitled "Who's Built Best to Ride: Men or Women?" at www.equinestudies.org under "Knowledge Base").

The second suggestion relates to saddle fit. Because they have such high withers, it can be very difficult to find a dressage, combination, or jumping saddle to fit a Saddlebred. The Western saddle Casey is using in the water-play photo fits fine, but the English saddle does not. It continually wants to slide backwards, because the gullet is too shallow for this horse and the fore-arch is too narrow and the bars do not have sufficient flare. This tempts Casey to over-tighten the girth in an attempt to hold the saddle in place—which causes the tree to gouge

into his back—which in turn adds to the gelding's desire to tighten and drop his back in order to get away from the discomfort. The right solution is instead to find a saddle built on a tree that has the correct shape. Hundreds of our readers have had similar difficulty in finding a saddle to fit their Thoroughbred or Warmblood horse. For a free one-hour educational video which will teach you to identify and fit saddles and understand saddle structure, go online to www.aboutthehorse.com and ask for the program "About the Horse".



Brucha, Jeannine Ann and Radiant Spark (Sparky)

16:1 hand gelding, 19 years old. By Gold Suntana by Carlos Santana (Supreme Sultan/Valley View Supreme). He out of Frosty Acres Golden Girl by Image's Golden Sunshine (Montrose). Radiant Spark out of Lickety Split Too (no available pedigree).

Jeannine-Anne's Sparky is yet another example of a horse with great bone structure beneath the skin. This animal also has a wonderful head, what I call a "noble" head, with prominent bone structure. This is, of course, the "before" picture revealing the slab-sided neck and tentlike, shiny back that are the telltale signs of stiffness. But wait 'til you turn the page....you will almost not be able to believe the difference that thoughtful conditioning makes.

Right: Jeannine Ann and Sparky in a dressage test.



Below: Sparky on a woodland trailride. Presumably Jeannine Ann has familiarized him with the slicker so that she can put it on or take it off while mounted without having this bother the horse.



so guess what! Jeannine Ann has conditioned her horse not only by means of arena schooling, but also on long trail-rides through gorgeous woods, riding uphill and down on logging roads and pine-scented trails. Work at a walk over uneven terrain is another way to stimulate and develop a horse's core muscles. Uphill work should initially be preferred to downhill work. Horses have to learn to coil their loins and step well up underneath themselves in order to go downhill well -- the feel to achieve is almost like "backing up while stepping down." And indeed, that is how to teach it -- choose a shallow ditch whose walls are not too steep, or else use the manure pile. Bring the horse to the brink and stop him. Then allow him to take only one step downward and stop him again. Then another single step, and another, until the bottom is reached. Soon the horse will put the brakes on when going downhill all by himself.





Byrne, Erin and Explosion in Gold (Rohan)

Gelding by Gold Suntana by Carlos Santana (Supreme Sultan/Valley View Supreme). He out of Frosty Acres Golden Girl by Image's Golden Sunshine (Montrose). Explosion in Gold out of Lady Shantilli by CMS Rampage (King's Genius). She out of Starheart's Lacy Rose by Strictly Sultan (Supreme Sultan/ Valley View Supreme). Tail Female: Stonewall King, RexMcDonald/ Rex Peavine.

Erin has supplied "before" and "after" photos but both of them were taken after reconditioning. They primarily show that the horse got fitter with training. This horse's breeding is pretty much the gold standard (not to make a bad pun) for choosing a Saddlebred for sporthorse use. The same bloodlines (especially Rex Peavine/Rex McDonald) that produce great five-gaited show horses also produce great sporthorses. See next page for a very nice picture of a "floating" canter. Their amazingly elastic canter is one of the best-kept secrets of the breed, mostly because canter is not emphasized in the conventional saddle-seat show ring.

Erin Byrne and her Saddlebred gelding Rohan perform in a dressage test. What lovely lightness! And what a lovely expression of sweet-minded cooperati we see on on the horse's face.





Left: Cardisco, Carine and Given the Sky (pedigree not available).

I can't stop chuckling over this photo. Carine is all dressed up for an African safari, complete with binoculars, Indiana Jones hat and her very own cooperative giraffe. Yes, Saddlebreds do often have long necks!

On the next page you see the pair in more athletic endeavors over jumps. The long neck is no disadvantage there, either. Note this horse's long forearms, wonderful broad knees and hocks, and substantial bone.

Carine Cardisco and her Saddlebred gelding Sky.

Right: over the rolltop.

Below: going cross-country.

This is a very perky horse with what appears to be a great working attitude. As master horseman Ray Hunt often noted -- “They come from the other side to help the rider out”!





Crawford, Amy and Callaway's Executive Decision (Ed)

Ed is by Will Shriver by Callaway's Johnny Gillen (Wing Commander). He out of Kate Shriver by Anacacho Denmark (Edna May's King). Callaway's Executive Decision is out of Miss Contract by Private Contract (Edna May's King). She out of Valley View Vanity by Valley View Supreme (King's Genius). Tail Female: Bourbon King, Chester Dare, Cabell's Lexington, Harrison Chief, Black Hawk 1833 (Morgan). This tail-female has a great deal of very old "foundational" blood.



Amy and Ed in about 1985, when she was a teen-ager and the horse was about four years old.

Amy and Ed warming up for a jumper class at a big competition. Ed became a champion jumper.



Amy not only sent us several good pictures but a short, well-written essay detailing her long and happy experience with Ed, quoted in full on the next page.

This story is the dream-come-true of a teenaged girl. Back in the 1980's Betty Goshorn Weldon, owner and director of Callaway Hills Stable in New Bloomfield, Missouri, generously gave away dozens of Saddlebred colts and fillies to young people involved with 4H. They were not "junk" representing the low end of her influential and excellent breeding program, but by her top stallion, World Champion Will Shriver (by Callaway's Johnny Gillen by Wing Commander, out of Kate Shriver by Anacacho Denmark, she out of Reverie's Desdemona by King's Genius). Amy was lucky enough to get one of these colts. As she tells it, "when I was in seventh grade, I entered an essay contest through 4-H and won...the contest was to win an American Saddlebred foal. Mrs. Weldon…wanted to expose more young people to the breed and generously gave away numerous young Saddlebreds to 4-H members through about a three or four year period in the 1980s.

"When I went to Callaway Hills to pick up my yearling, I found out the one I was slated to get had colicked the night before, so they substituted a two year old gelding. His groom said he was one of the smartest horses he'd ever worked with. We found a local trainer, Richard Garret, to help us with Ed and I became immersed into the world of Saddlebreds! As a teenager, I was in heaven! Ed became a show pleasure horse and I learned how to ride saddleseat.

"Coming from a Quarter Horse/ranch horse background, this was all very new to me! I loved it though, and grew to love Ed so much. He was my friend, confidante, show horse, run-through-the-fields horse, and driving horse (another thing I'd never done before owning Ed). After a couple years of showing saddleseat, I decided to try the Saddlebred western and hunt divisions, and Ed was so much more comfortable in those frames and disciplines! He became a very successful western and hunt show horse, winning some big classes at prestigious shows.

"Later in my life, I got married and moved to Montana, and I of course brought Ed with me. He learned how to navigate some pretty hairy mountain trails and drag deer and elk down the mountains on hunting trips. Just for fun, I barrel raced him – often winning! He was my steady-eddy ponying horse for youngsters, I roped off him, worked cattle with him and could put beginners on him with confidence. He was truly the epitome of a versatile horse.

Ed had a very bad cattle guard accident once we'd moved back to Missouri, and his recovery and subsequent muscle atrophy from the months of stall rest was the reason I ended up going into equine sports massage therapy as my career for the last twenty years. He lived his last years in retirement with me until I had to humanely euthanize him in 2009 at the age of 24. To this day, he's the best horse I've ever owned or ridden. Truly, he was one of the special ones!"

Cartier, Kimberly and Wabi Sabi (Wasabi)

Wasabi is by Broadway on Phire (Wing Commander). He out of Broadway Julie by The New York Times (Wing Commander). Wabi Sabi is out of Phi Rockette by Reedau's Nassau (Wing Commander). She out of Phigurine by Phi Slama Jama (King's Genius). Tail female: Edna May's King, Montrose, Bourbon Chief, Harrison Chief, Black Squirrel, Tom Hal (Morgan).

Right: Kim and Wasabi going cross-country at a gallop.

Below: Coming on strong through the water jump.

I love this horse's alert, cheerful expression.



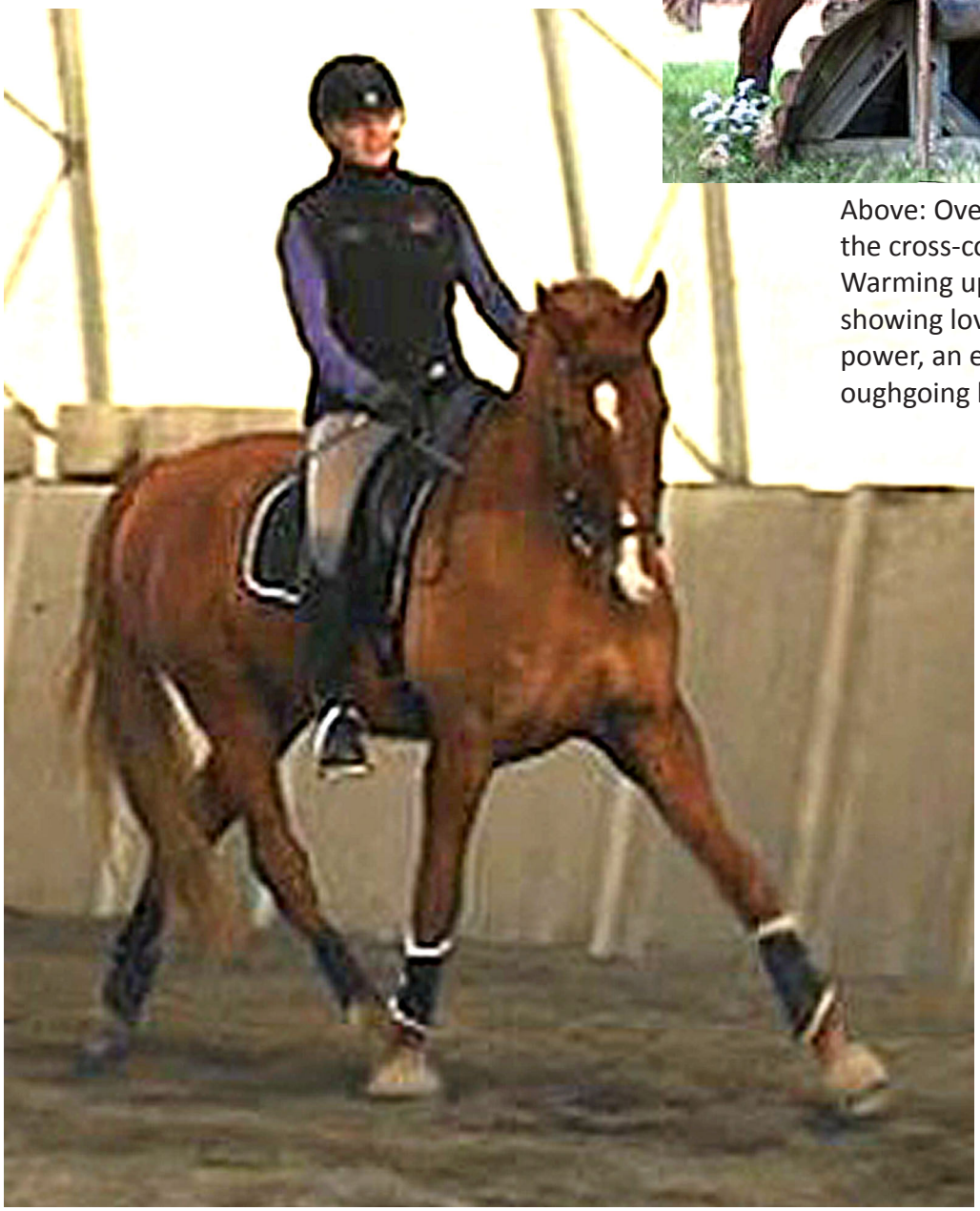


One of the more subtle advantages to Saddlebreds as eventers is that they do not "condition up" like Thoroughbreds. What I mean by this is that breezing and hard workouts do not tend to render their muscles as hard-fit and stiff, something that can be a problem with Thoroughbreds. Tension, which is a factor that arises both out of physical discomfort and mental worry or distraction, drops to low levels

once the Saddlebred knows his job and is confident of being able to perform it, as here. Then the tremendous ability to focus that we have already seen in other examples comes into play.

The photo below is a good example of a correctly-ridden corner, in which the horse untracks and thus bends from poll to tail. Note also the correct trot cadence. These are instructive images of a highly successful rider-horse team.





Above: Over the log roller during the cross-country phase. Left: Warming up for the dressage test, showing lovely expression, lots of power, an elastic back and thoroughgoing bend.

Daley, Katie and Three Socks, 11 year old gelding (pedigree not available).



The breathtaking image above shows just how great the “great outdoors” can be in the American West. The trail takes them steeply uphill over sandy and rocky ground, through patches of gray-green alpine poppies. The sun is warm but the air is chilly at this altitude. The horse takes in big breaths of the juniper-scented air. Many Saddlebreds have done well in Enduro competition, as they retain the toughness that once universally characterized the breed. In the inset photo, note the horse’s excellent bone substance and healthy, well-balanced hoofs. They’re making some speed in galloping down the road, with straps and sponge flapping and bouncing -- does not bother the horse at all. Katie appears to be having the time of her life, and the horse looks perky and fresh.

Dall, Valyn: Paddyngton's Golden Glory (Theodore)

15 year old gelding by Harlem's Hot Gold by Broadway's Hot Shot (King's Genius), he out of Josepha by Harlem Globetrotter (Wing Commander). Paddyngton's Golden Glory is out of She's a Moviestar by Exalted Effect (Wing Commander). She out of Hollywood Excellence (Wing Commander). Tail female: Rex Peavine/Rex McDonald, King's Genius, Stonewall King.



Again we have here pretty much the standard pedigree for the Saddlebred sporthorse prospect. In this "before" image, the horse's back is still somewhat saggy although it has already lost the hard, tentlike look of stiffness and the neck has begun to muscle up properly, too. Note the excellent bone substance, broad hocks and knees, lovely shoulder, and big muscular butt. Valyn did not supply us with an "after" photo but the dressage photos on the next page hint at some good physical changes which have occurred.

Right: Theodore producing a very good quality trot for Valyn during a dressage test. Notice that the left fore hoof grounds an instant before its mate, the right hind. This slight discadence is not a fault but a sign that the horse is carrying more weight on the hindquarter than on the forequarter.





Left: The lightness demonstrated in the trot photo is even more evident in this image which catches the horse during the suspension phase of canter. The best-kept secret of Saddlebreds is their elastic, springy, effortless canter.

Decker, Brittany and Robert's Sweet Thunder.

Gelding by Crosswinds Sweet Thunder (Valley View Supreme). He out of The Best Time by New York Times (Wing Commander). Robert's Sweet Thunder is out of Satin's Shady Lady by Dark Satin (Valley View Supreme). She out of Stellar Performance by Vanity's Sensation of Crebilly (Rex Peavine/Rex McDonald). Tail Female: Rex Peavine/ Rex McDonald, Bourbon King, Black Squirrel, Davy Crockett, Pat Cleburne (a lot of old blood in this tail-female).





Above: Brittany and Thunder in a dressage test. I like the Baucher snaffle but Brittany would find that it would work much better if she would remove the cumbersome and uncomfortable dropped noseband.

Left: Knees folded tight and well up over a jump. Note the lovely shoulder and lots of thrus from behind.

Thunder is one of the narrower-bodied horses presented in this survey but still of sufficient width and substance for the uses shown. He has an exceptionally fine neck and Brittany is to be commended for not causing it to break at the third joint. Rather, the horse arches the neck from the base and goes properly to the hand. Note the horse's rather "intense" eye and expression of "big try".

Dunlop, Ashley and Something About Me (Stout)

Gelding by Sweet Harlem Supreme by Harlem's Supreme Commander (Wing Commander). He out of Dressed in Black (Wing Commander). Something About Me is out of Something About Amelia by Admiral's Windjammer (Wing Commander). She out of Hale-Bopp (Wing Commander). Tail Female: Kalarama Rex, King's Genius, Stonewall King, Rex Peavine/Rex McDonald, Chester Dare.



Ashley and Stout make an excellent, tight turn in pole-bending. The bit is a mild gag with a noseband option that causes pressure to come as much on the nose and bars of the jaws as on the horse's mouth.

Many an old-time Saddlebred breeder would aver that it's the Chester Dare blood in this horse that gives him an extra degree of width through the chest and body, and puts the competitive fire into his attitude. This is a horse that does not like to lose and Ashley is enjoying every minute of it.

Saddlebreds can be just as speedy as Quarter Horses in gymkhana events; indeed the two breeds share a good deal of root-ancestry. Conformationally, Stout's excellent knees and hocks, good hoof quality, and powerful muscling behind.

Can this horse hustle? You bet. And notice: he's five-gaited; the image below shows Ashley and Stout at a smooth-going and speedy rack. Some of the best Saddlebred sporthorses have come from Wing Commander, who was World Champion as a five-gaited stallion for a number of years in the 1940's.



Ashley does not say so, but it's possible that this horse does not much enjoy trotting. What she has done is found activities that suit him. It's always best to ask the horse what sort of things he'd like to do, and to observe what he's best at. Even the Spanish Riding School does not train every stallion for the same "airs above the ground." On the other hand, if your heart's desire is dressage or some other venue where trotting is required, then of course before you purchase you will observe the horse, photograph him from every angle, watch him being ridden, and ride him yourself.



Above: Ashley and Stout bringing it home. Left: The pair at an old-fashioned, country-style rack. There's no "set" tail and no bustle (tail cradle). Ashley uses a standard bridle with Tom Bass Weymouth. Note the "crossover" grip, which tends to emphasize the snaffle over the curb (instead of an "open" grip where the curb rein is on the bottom).



Edwards, Paula and Jigger O'
Canadian, 9 year old mare
(pedigree not available).



Paula writes to say that she's nearly six feet tall, so I'm sure that Jiggs stands at least 14:3 hands. The Saddlebred filly she's ponying in the photo to the right is a much taller and narrower individual.

Once a horse becomes a safe ride, ponying is an excellent way to educate both the horse being ponied off of and the one being ponied.

The photo above of Jigg in harness shows the value that driving can have -- if there is no tight overcheck. Unburdened by a rider's weight and free to lengthen its topline, the horse readily discovers the elements of collection: rounding the back, coiling the loins, and arching the neck.



Edwards, Paula: Sensational Money (Ronni)

8 year old mare by Warlord's Sensation out of Pocketful of Money (no listed pedigrees).



Obviously, these are the "before" pictures. Paula tells us that this mare was in very low condition when purchased -- no better than a condition score 4. There is one advantage to this, in that thinness makes the bone structure obvious. The mare has a good coupling, very good pelvic length, excellent breadth through the hocks, and a long although somewhat upright shoulder. The withers are high -- typical of Saddlebreds -- and the neck is long and fine.

Paula reports that Ronni had originally been used as a racking horse -- in many rural communities in the South, informal racing of such horses has been a popular pastime since Colonial days. The photo below shows an important aspect of reconditioning: encouraging long, fluid steps in the most important of all gaits, the walk.

Paula sent me the photo at right very recently, two years after the walk photo and four years after the initial pictures where she was so thin. Paula reports that Ronni has done nothing but improve over this time and I would certainly have to agree. This is a good mare that I would consider breeding to produce crossbreds, either by using a Quarter Horse stallion, a Connemara stallion, or a small Belgian to produce what are now being called “Georgia Grands”.





Elkins, Kim and Royal Velvet

11 year old gelding by Velvet Hammer by Haven's Hero (Wing Commander). He out of So Emotional by Harlem Globetrotter (Wing Commander). Royal Velvet is out of Royal Bonnet by Royal Return (Valley View Supreme). She out of The War Bonnet by War Whoop Two (Valley View Supreme). Tail female: Wing Commander, Rex Peavine/Rex McDonald, Bourbon King, Montrose.



Kim and Velvet appear to be having a happy day out in sagebrush country. She appears to be geared for some type of Enduro contest. It has been said that heavyweight riders cannot win in Enduro, but coming in first is certainly not everything. The old maxim of this sport was "to finish is to win" and in former times, the most prestigious award was not the first-finisher's blue ribbon but the Best Conditioned award. It is perfectly possible to participate in long-distance trailrides by deliberately tailing the field or working for the ride as a "pickup" who scouts for lost, injured, or lagging participants and calls for medical or other help if needed.

In terms of the horse's conformation, successful Enduro competitors should have the strongest possible coupling (which assists weightbearing and prevents back fatigue), combined with a deep but rather narrow chest (to assist heat dissipation and increase heart room). The horse should also have a very good set of legs and hoofs. Velvet appears to have all these points plus the cheerful good attitude usual with Saddlebreds.