

M O D E R N

AMATEUR

M A G A Z I N E

amateur
hour
with
jessica
paquette

built to
LAST

INSIDE
PS OF SWEDEN'S
MOST PERSONAL
COLLECTION

LIFE *of a*
SHOW *{girl}*
SECRETARY

MUD,
MOVEMENT,
and the
SCIENCE
of a
HAPPY
HORSE

aria
BACHAN

CLIMBING MY EVEREST

A close-up photograph of a person riding a brown horse. The rider is wearing blue jeans and a brown leather saddle with yellow stitching. The horse's head and neck are visible on the left, and its body extends to the right. The background is a blurred green field under a bright sky.

BELONGING

comes from

SHOWING UP

and allowing ourselves to

TAKE UP

SPACE

PHOTOGRAPH BY JESS OGDEN

MODERN AMATEUR MAGAZINE

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A quiet moment watching the geldings graze before coming in from the heat of the day; a goofy photo of a friendly OTTB; a young Thoroughbred enjoying turnout; all smiles catch-riding at a local schooling show.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Summer is finally winding down, and that means cooler temperatures are (hopefully) on the way—and with them, longer rides, more comfortable show days, and more time with our four legged friends in the great outdoors. I especially love autumn's crisp scents: pumpkin spice, cinnamon, leaves, fire pits, dried hay, chilly air. Is there anything better?

In preparing for this issue, which I've been referring to as "The Long Game," I've been thinking about the different seasons that we as equestrians tend to endure. There's our Spring, which is when we initially fall in love with horses and with riding. Maybe this happened when you were a kid, or maybe this happened a little later in life, but it's the same for all of us: a brand new world full of possibilities and exciting challenges. Our Summer typically includes all the adventures we dream about: taking long trail rides, teaching new skills, moving up the levels, trying new things. Equestrian Autumn, like "normal" autumn, is my favorite: long, relaxed days at the barn just spending time with the horses, without the pressure of a goal or level to achieve, a ribbon to chase, or a race to win. It's the natural precursor to Winter, when we retire our beloved companions or step them down from their jobs to preserve their bodies and minds. Regardless of which season you're in, The Long Game is something every equestrian considers and strives for along their journey.

This issue brings you stories from across the world of equestrians in different seasons of life. For some, like our cover subject Aria, summer is in full swing with an exceptionally athletic partner. For others, like the women in our featured article *Built to Last* (page 24), the seasons come out of order and last for indeterminate amounts of time. Every equestrian knows that when it comes to horses, nothing is guaranteed except that you don't get guarantees.

It is my sincere hope with each installment of *Modern Amateur Magazine* that stories like this are not only shared with you, but show you that there is no one way to enjoy life with horses and give you the opportunity to learn all the different ways others are choosing to share their space with them. I welcome the opportunity to share your story with the community and invite you to help us spread the message of inclusion and warmth to all the horse people in your life.

To you and your horse's health, with warmth,

Blair

 @BLAIRBUSHEQ



PHOTOGRAPH BY
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PHOTOGRAPH BY JESS OGDEN

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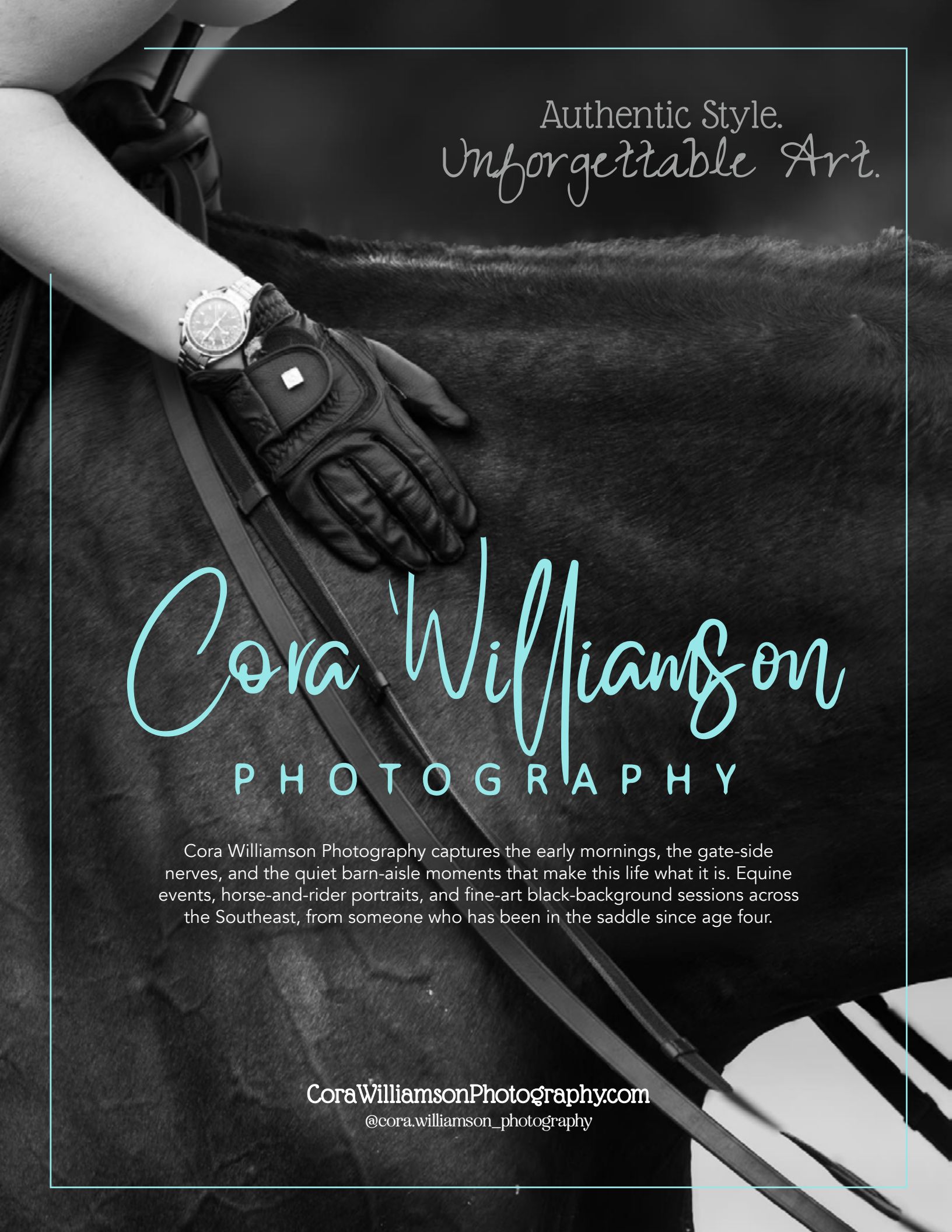
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Gear, finds, and the stuff worth buying at prices that reflect what most of us are actually working with.



Authentic Style.
Unforgettable Art.

Cora Williamson

PHOTOGRAPHY

Cora Williamson Photography captures the early mornings, the gate-side nerves, and the quiet barn-aisle moments that make this life what it is. Equine events, horse-and-rider portraits, and fine-art black-background sessions across the Southeast, from someone who has been in the saddle since age four.

CoraWilliamsonPhotography.com
[@cora.williamson_photography](https://www.instagram.com/cora.williamson_photography)



ON OUR RADAR

The equestrian world moves fast.
Here's what we're paying attention to right now.



BLM CAPTURES & CULLS WILD HORSE POPULATION

In a controversial move, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recently came under fire for using helicopters to round up wild horses on federally protected land in Colorado, which is just a portion of public rangeland that spans 10 states across the American West. Citing an excess of wild horses and their cost to the American taxpayer (nearly \$50M annually), the BLM estimates that around 8,000 of the nearly 86,000 wild horses and burros will be culled from the population, with the majority of these animals located in Arizona, California, and Nevada.

Public sentiment is mixed-to-negative despite the regular nature of the practice, with some citizens openly disparaging the rough nature of the capture and treatment of the animals once in captivity, and an ever growing concern that protected wild horses are being sent to slaughterhouses. ★



FDA AUTHORIZES EMERGENCY DRUG FOR NWS OUTBREAK

As temperatures rise, portions of the southern United States become more inhabitable for New World Screwworms (NWS), and their effect on horses can be life-threatening. Unlike other worms and flies, NWS lay eggs in open wounds (including healing umbilical wounds) or superficial cavities (like noses and sheaths) and feed on living tissue.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has authorized the emergency use of liquid Ivermectin for the short-term prevention of infestations. Signs of an infestation include severe pain, wounds that won't heal, visible maggots, and a foul odor. If you suspect that your horse is affected, isolate them and contact your veterinarian immediately. Be prepared to take well-lit, detailed photos of the affected area to track progress of the suspected infection. ★



Editor's Picks

PODCAST EDITION

I live in Atlanta, which means a lot of time is spent in traffic wishing I was doing literally anything else—but these podcasts make my commute much more bearable. This is what I listened to over the summer and why I think you should give them a shot!



PODCAST: Horse Person Podcast

EPISODE: "How Is Anyone Affording This? You Called In!"

WHY I LOVE IT: I love the opportunity to talk about how people are making their budgets fit horses and everything that goes with them (mostly because it feels like the horse world has a major ick around discussing this topic). Real conversations from real people made me feel seen and understood, and I can always use more of that in this sport!

[Listen Here.](#)



PODCAST: This Equestrian Life

EPISODE: Episode 56 | Confidence, Comfort, & Competition with Miri and Rhi

WHY I LOVE IT: This episode felt like sitting down and chatting with a couple of friends across the pond. I admire the slower, more intentional vibe that European horsemanship seems to have, and these ladies sprinkle lots of practical advice (love the conversation around pulling manes vs. raking them!) throughout this candid conversation.

[Listen Here.](#)



PODCAST: Because of the Horse Podcast

EPISODE: Episode 34 | A Horse's Life: The Neuroscience of Equine Welfare

WHY I LOVE IT: I am a *big* fan of science-backed horsemanship and using what we know about their brains to be better stewards of equine welfare. In this episode, the authors of the book (which I *will* be buying, by the way) talk about how we can use advancements in neuroscience to be more effective, communicative partners for our equine counterparts.

[Listen Here.](#)



PODCAST: Amateur Hour with Jessica Paquette

EPISODE: The View from the Sidelines

WHY I LOVE IT: Jessica really hit me right in the feelings with this one! As someone who is also taking some time off to get other parts of my life in order (and really missing being in the saddle in the meantime), this conversation with Adult Ammy Strong's Sarah Mahoney really helped soothe my soul and changed my perspective on the challenge of being patient.

[Listen Here.](#)

MODERN
AMATEUR
MAGAZINE

Your Story Belongs Here.

Modern Amateur Magazine was built on the idea that the most honest, most useful, most genuinely interesting equestrian content comes from the people actually living this life, not just writing about it from the outside. If you have a story worth telling, we want to hear it. Essays about the unglamorous reality of barn life. Photography that captures something true about horses and the people who love them. Pitches for pieces that would make you say finally if you read them somewhere else. We are a small publication with a real editorial eye and a genuine commitment to the amateur rider's experience. We read every submission.

WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR:

Essays and personal narratives: 800–2,000 words

Photography: editorial, documentary, barn life, competition

Story pitches: one paragraph is enough to start a conversation

WHAT CONTRIBUTORS RECEIVE:

A byline and bio in the magazine, publication on ModernAmateur.com, and promotion across our social channels to an audience of riders who will actually get it, because they're living it too.

EDITORIAL RIGHTS:

Modern Amateur acquires first digital publication rights. You retain ownership of your work and are free to republish it elsewhere after it appears in the magazine and on our website. Photography rights remain with the photographer; we ask for permission to publish and promote, nothing more.

RESPONSE TIME:

We do our best to respond to all submissions within four to six business days. If your piece is time-sensitive, note that in your email and we'll prioritize accordingly.

TO SUBMIT:

Email submissions@modernamateur.com

Subject line: SUBMISSION

Dear AMATEUR

Real questions from real ammys about the messy, complicated, occasionally wonderful experience of being a horse person.

Q I've been at the same barn for four years. There's a newer rider who's clearly more talented than me and my trainer spends most of the lesson time on her now. I don't think I'm being petty, but I also can't tell if I am. How do I know when it's time to find a new barn versus when I'm just being sensitive?

A As I'm sure you know, this is a really common problem in lesson barns—especially lesson barns with competitive teams and lots of riders. From the barn's perspective, talented riders who take instruction well and bring home ribbons make the program look good to prospective riders and boarders, which is how the barn makes money.

That being said, you're not being petty. If you're in a group lesson setting (which is what it seems like this is), you're paying the same amount of money to be there as everyone else in the group, and it's not fair for your trainer to spend more time with them than other riders (assuming this is a consistent occurrence and not a one-time thing where a situation requires more attention to address). The solution: invite your trainer to lunch and ask her to discuss your riding and your goals with you, and use that as an opportunity to bring up wanting more equal instruction time. Be prepared for her to suggest private lessons or another time slot as a solution.

If it continues to be a problem after you discuss, then it's an incompatibility between her teaching style and your desires—and that might be the time to start shopping for a new program.

Q I took almost fifteen years off from horses and just got back in the saddle last spring. I feel like I'm starting over, but my body and my ego remember what I used to be able to do. Everyone at my barn is kind, but I'm embarrassed in a way I didn't expect. Is this just part of coming back, or does it get better?

A Welcome back! We're so happy you've re-entered horse world. As someone wise once said: "You have to be comfortable with being bad at something before you can be good at something." This is just part of the process, and the sooner you embrace it, the sooner you can get out of your own way and start working on being the incredible rider you can be.

It can be hard to try new things as an adult but it's so rewarding when you let the embarrassment roll off your back. Lean on your (amazing) community and enjoy the ride!

WANT TO ASK
A QUESTION?

Scan the QR code to submit
your anonymous question.
You may see it in a future
issue!



"Softer hands!"

"Let him travel."

"More leg."

"Just Relax."

"Sit up. Sit up.
SIT UP!"

OVERHEARD AT THE BARN

"Did anyone see
where I laid down
the saddle soap?"

"If you forget to latch the gate again you're
scrubbing water troughs with your toothbrush."

"This is her fifth fly mask
this summer. The others
are....out there somewhere."

"Three strides out is not the time to
second-guess your life choices."

"Perfect. Now do it three
more times, but better."

TRAIL READY *checklist*

**Before the season closes, make sure
you and your horse are actually ready.**

- ☐ Hooves are in good shape for uneven terrain; talk to your farrier about traction
- ☐ First aid kit is stocked and in the trailer, not in the barn
- ☐ ID tag or visible identification on your horse's halter
- ☐ Emergency contact visible on your person, not just in your phone
- ☐ Water and a collapsible bucket for longer rides
- ☐ Know the trail; download a map you can access without cell service
- ☐ Let someone know where you're going and when to expect you back
- ☐ Your helmet actually fits and hasn't taken a hit since you last checked it

IN THE BARN





MUD MOVEMENT & THE SCIENCE OF A HAPPY HORSE

by BLAIR BUSH

Most of us don't pick our barns the way we'd pick them if money and time were unlimited. We pick the one with the right trainer, the one we can afford, the one that's twenty minutes from home instead of forty-five. Turnout availability rarely makes the shortlist when you're also weighing board rates and arena footing.

This isn't an article designed to make you feel guilty about where your horse lives. But it is an article about what the research actually says, because the equestrian industry has been slow to reckon with findings that other horse cultures, particularly in Europe and the UK, have taken seriously for decades.

WHAT HORSES ARE ACTUALLY BUILT TO DO

Feral horses cover between 10 and 16 miles a day. Not in organized work. Just walking, grazing, and moving from one patch of forage to the next, nearly without stopping. Research on feral horse populations in the American West consistently shows this pattern: near-constant, low-level movement, with horses grazing for up to 16 hours out of 24. (Berger, J. *Wild Horses of the Great Basin*. University of Chicago Press, 1986.)

The average stabled performance horse gets two to four hours outside his stall each day. Sometimes less.

Everything about a horse's health, from his gut to his lungs to his brain, evolved around that movement. When we take it away, things go wrong. The research is fairly consistent about what that looks like.

THE GUT

A horse's stomach produces acid continuously, whether he's eating or not. The natural buffer for that acid is saliva, which is produced through chewing. A horse grazing freely produces enough saliva to keep his stomach reasonably buffered. A horse standing in a stall waiting for his morning feed does not.

The result: studies have found gastric ulcers in 60 to 90 percent of performance horses, depending on discipline and management. Racehorses and sport horses in full training are at the highest end of that range. Horses with consistent access to pasture and free-choice forage show significantly lower prevalence. (Andrews FM, et al. *Equine Veterinary Journal*, 2005.)

Colic follows similar logic. A moving horse keeps his gut moving. A stationary horse doesn't. Impaction colic, one of the most common types in domestic horses, occurs when gut contents slow down and dry out. A prospective study following over 1,000 horses found stabling significantly increased colic risk compared to horses kept on pasture. (Tinker MK, White NA, Lessard P, et al. "Prospective study of equine colic incidence and mortality." *Equine Veterinary Journal*. 1997;29(6):448-453.)

THE LUNGS

Even a well-managed stall has dust. It has ammonia from urine, particles from hay and bedding, and limited fresh air circulation. Horses breathe all of this, all day and all night.

Over time, this adds up. Inflammatory airway disease, sometimes called equine asthma in its more severe form, is strongly associated with time spent in enclosed stabling. A consensus statement representing the current standard of care on this issue found that environmental management, specifically reducing dust and ammonia exposure, is the single most important treatment factor. (Couëtil LL, Cardwell JM, Gerber V, et al. "Inflammatory Airway Disease of Horses: Revised Consensus Statement." *Journal of Veterinary Internal Medicine*. 2016;30(2):503-515.) Horses with consistent outdoor access have meaningfully lower rates of respiratory inflammation.

THE MIND

This is where some readers will push back, so let's be direct about it.

Cribbing, weaving, stall walking, wood chewing: these are called *stereotypies*, meaning repetitive behaviors that serve no clear function. For a long time the horse world treated them as vices or bad habits picked up from barn mates. The research says something different.

A study published in *Equine Veterinary Journal* found that stereotypies were strongly associated with management factors including stall confinement, high concentrate feeding, and limited forage access. These behaviors don't develop in horses who live primarily outside. They develop in horses who have no other way to cope with an environment that doesn't allow them to meet their basic behavioral needs. (McGreevy PD, Cripps PJ, French NP, Green LE, Nicol CJ. "Management factors associated with stereotypic and redirected behaviour in the Thoroughbred horse." *Equine Veterinary Journal*. 1995;27(2):86-91.)

Research measuring cortisol levels, the body's primary stress hormone, in stalled versus pastured horses consistently finds higher stress markers in horses with limited turnout and limited social contact. (Rivera E, Benjamin S,

Nielsen B, Shelle J, Zanella AJ. "Behavioral and physiological responses of horses to initial training: the comparison between pastured versus stalled horses." *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*. 2002;78(2-4):235-252.)

THE INJURY ARGUMENT

Yes, horses get hurt in turnout. This is true.

They also get cast in stalls, develop laminitis worsened by inactivity, and bow tendons standing still. The more useful question is whether the cumulative health costs of confinement outweigh the risks of movement. For most horses, the evidence says yes.

Research on young horses found that group housing with regular movement produced better behavioral outcomes and lower stress during training than stall housing. (Søndergaard E, Ladewig J. "Group housing exerts a positive effect on the behaviour of young horses during training." *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*. 2004;87(1-2):105-118.) Movement on varied terrain, including uneven or soft footing, builds the small muscles and proprioceptive responses that flat arena work doesn't fully replicate.

WHAT YOU CAN ACTUALLY DO

We are not going to pretend everyone reading this can call their barn manager tomorrow and demand different housing arrangements. Boarding is a negotiation, and most of us are not in a position to dictate management practices.

But you can ask specific questions about turnout when evaluating a new barn. You can advocate for free-choice hay in your horse's stall, which addresses the acid buffering problem even when outdoor time is limited. You can pay attention to your horse's behavior over time, because stereotypies and changes in temperament are information.

And you can push back, gently, on the assumption that more stall time means more safety. The science has moved. A lot of barn management hasn't.

The mud washes off. The rest of it is harder to undo. ★

AT THE CROSS TIES

Real answers to the horsemanship questions you've been sitting on.

Q My horse pins his ears every time I tighten the girth. My trainer says it's just a habit. How do I know if it's actually discomfort?

I always hear a little red flag whenever the phrase "it's just a habit" starts being thrown around, especially when it comes to clear communication signals like pinned ears. Horses literally don't have the brain structure to act out of spite or plan revenge (check out Janet Jones, Ph.D.'s amazing book *Horse Brain Human Brain* for more on this!), so I'd argue that this is a pain (or "remembered pain") response, especially if your horse doesn't show discomfort in other parts of the tacking or grooming process. Rule out common symptoms like (ill fitting tack and ulcers) and plan on slowly rebuilding your horse's trust surrounding his girth once the symptoms are investigated and addressed.

Q My horse has been spooking at things he ignored all summer. Is this just "fall brain," or is it worth a vet call?

Dr. Temple Grandin has done a ton of research on horses, fear, and desensitizing them to things that are scary. "By understanding that horses view different sides of things as entirely new," she says, "we can aim to desensitize them to everyday objects from all angles for better safety and welfare."

Horses store visual memories differently than we do, and they need to see things from all angles to make sense of them. If things are changing with the seasons—foliage, landscape, new things like coats and scarves hanging in the barn—your horse's spooking might just need some exposure training. However, if the things he's spooking at have remained unchanged or slow, intentional desensitization sessions haven't helped, it might be time to get your vet involved to rule out any vision or neurological changes that might be taking place.



CLIMBING MY

Everest

Adult amateur eventer Aria Bachan on the horse who challenged her, the trainer who pushed her, and refusing to accept that she didn't belong.

by BLAIR BUSH

photographs by HALLIE BURDEN,
ARIA BACHAN, & CORA WILLIAMSON

Before Aria Bachan was an adult amateur eventer, she was a ten-year-old with a golf cart.

She would drive it up to the fence line at the Chateau Elan hunter-jumper shows and watch the riders compete—the horses, the courses, the whole particular world of it. She remembers thinking, very clearly: *I want to do that.*

Her grandma helped her find a barn. The first one wasn't right. The second one was, and she stayed there for thirteen years.

That is the origin story of most adult amateurs, in one way or another. Someone or something we watched. A thing we decided we wanted. A slow, uneven path toward getting there. What separates Aria's story from the version most riders tell isn't the the golf cart. It's what happened after she got in the saddle: at almost every lesson, every horse show, every clinic, she was the only Black rider in the room.

“At first, it was intimidating,” she said. “You become very aware of the fact that you don’t look like everyone else, and it’s easy to wonder if you truly belong.”

That wondering is the piece that most equestrians never have to do. It’s also the piece that shapes everything that came after.

ON BELONGING

Aria is now an adult amateur eventer based in the Southeast, working a full-time job as a health benefits analyst at a consulting firm and riding a big gray horse named Everest under the guidance of her trainer, Eden Miller. She started with RIFNA equitation-style shows as a kid, moved into combined training, and eventually landed in eventing at her current barn, drawn to the discipline precisely because it scared her.

She still notices, walking into most horse shows, that she is often the only Black rider in the ring. What has changed is what she does with the noticing.

“I no longer see being the only one in the ring as something that sets me apart in a negative way,” she said. “Instead, I see it as an opportunity. If someone sees me competing and realizes, *there’s someone who looks like me doing this*, then maybe they’ll believe they can do it too.”

She carefully draws a distinction: representation is not the same thing as belonging. Representation is being visible. Belonging is being welcomed. And the equestrian industry, from her perspective, has been much better at the first than the second.

“The conversation often stops at representation instead of continuing into belonging,” she said. “It’s wonderful to celebrate diversity, but it shouldn’t only happen during a campaign or a designated month. Inclusion is something that should be reflected in the everyday stories we tell, the athletes we highlight, the brands we partner with, and the opportunities we create.”

She also pushes back on the reduction that happens when representation becomes a single story. “Black equestri-

ans aren’t a monolith. We all come from different backgrounds, disciplines, and experiences, and those stories deserve to be told in an authentic way rather than being reduced to a single narrative.”

The moment that most crystallizes why she keeps sharing her journey happened at HJ Fox (a local show series in the north Atlanta suburbs), when the mother of a young rider approached her ringside. Her daughter, the woman said, looked up to Aria. Seeing Aria’s journey meant something to her.

“Knowing that another young Black rider can see herself belonging in this sport means more to me than any ribbon,” Aria said.

This is her point about belonging, in practice. It doesn’t look like a campaign. It looks like a mother walking up to a stranger at a horse show and saying: *my daughter sees you*.

“Success isn’t always
about having a
flawless
performance”

MEET EVEREST

She swore she would never own a gray. The first horse she ever showed was gray, and she was done with it after that.

Then Everest came along.

He is a Dutch Harness Horse/Percheron cross—big, powerful, and impossible to miss. He is also gray. Dapple gray, specifically, the kind that photographs like a fairy tale and, presumably, still requires a lot of shampoo.

Aria didn’t know he was the one on the day she got him. If anything, she questioned whether she had made the right decision.

“Everest is a big Dutch Harness Horse/Percheron cross with an even bigger personality,” she said, “and I quickly realized he wasn’t going to be the straightforward, push-button horse I was used to riding.”

But there was something about him that kept pulling her in. Curious. Expressive. Intelligent. In the pasture, he is playful and always aware of what is happening around him. When he locks onto a jump, his whole expression changes: ears forward, focus sharpening, the power and

determination gathering underneath him before he even leaves the ground.

He also has opinions, and he isn't afraid to share them. He is sensitive enough that he can't be strong-armed into anything. He responds to patience, to clarity, to a rider who is willing to communicate rather than command.

He is, in other words, exactly the wrong horse for someone looking to take the easy path. He is also the horse who has taught Aria, again and again, that the best partnerships aren't the ones that arrive fully formed. They are the ones that get built. The ones where the horse gives you his best because you've given him yours.

"Like any rider, I've made my share of mistakes," she said—wrong distances, getting left behind, not giving him the perfect ride. "Time after time, Everest has been incredibly forgiving. Instead of making me pay for those mistakes, he tries his heart out to get us to the other side of the fence safely."

Her trainer's trainer, Gerhard Ablinger, once told her that a horse like Everest—not a schoolmaster, but with drive and heart and a real opinion about the world—is the kind of horse who can take a rider through a 4-foot-9 triple combination.

"That meant so much," she said, "because it reminded me that Everest's opinions aren't a weakness. They're part of what makes him special."

THE RAINY STARTER

Her first real cross-country experience was a Starter course at a schooling show, on a day when the sky refused to cooperate.

It had been raining. The ground was slippery. Aria stood in the start box thinking, what did I sign up for?

She was nervous, and she was excited, and the two feelings were doing exactly what they always do at the start box: refusing to sort themselves out.

She and Everest were still learning to trust each other on course. They stopped at almost every fence. Every stop, they regrouped. Took a breath. Tried again. Every stop, they kept going.



By the end of the course, they had jumped every fence. And somehow—the part Aria still finds funny—they finished with no penalties.

"It wasn't a perfect round by any means," she said, "but it was one of the most valuable rides I've ever had. It taught me that success isn't always about having a flawless performance. Sometimes it's about staying determined, working through the challenges, and finishing what you started."

When she crossed the finish line, she wasn't proud because they had nailed it. She was proud because they had faced something that scared them and finished it anyway.

That is what cross-country actually looks like from the inside. Not fearless. Not smooth. Not the version that gets edited into a highlight reel on Instagram. Real cross-country is the version where you get to the other side of the fence because you decided you could.

THE REFUSAL

Ask Aria what her real turning point was as a rider, and she won't tell you about a jump; she will tell you about a dressage arena.

From the beginning, she was told that dressage was going to be their weakest phase. Everest wants to move forward. He is opinionated. He can be defensive. Developing the strength and patience dressage requires wasn't going to happen overnight, and it might not happen at all in the way it does for a purpose-bred warmblood.

She could have accepted that ceiling. Plenty of riders do. Instead, it made her stubborn.

"I'm determined to prove that with time, consistency, and the right training, Everest can become a good dressage horse," she said. "Maybe he'll never move like a purpose-bred warmblood, but I know he's capable of so much more than people expect."

Every improvement, no matter how small, feels earned to her. Every marginally better score. Every marginally more connected ride. She sees them all as evidence—not that they'll get to the top of the sport, but that they are allowed to keep climbing.

This is the sentence in her story that reveals who she actually is: "I refused to give up on that goal."

A REAL WEEK

The balancing act is real, and Aria is honest about it in the way most adult amateurs learn to be honest about it eventually.

She works a full-time desk job. She is up at 5 a.m. on office days. Between the commute, the traffic, and the sheer exhaustion of a day at a screen, Tuesdays aren't a barn day for her.

Most days, though, she logs off and heads straight to Everest. Lesson, flat ride, jump school, groundwork—it depends on the day. It depends on the horse. Some days she questions how she is fitting it all in.

Then she pulls into the barn.

"The stress of the day melts away," she said. "Horses have become my escape and my reset."

That is a sentence most adult amateurs have thought and never said out loud. Aria says it out loud. That, too, is a small piece of the belonging she is building for other people who need to hear it.

WHAT SHE WANTS YOU TO KNOW

If you are reading this and wondering whether you belong in this sport, Aria has an answer for you.

"I want them to know that they belong before they ever feel like they do," she said. "So many people look around this sport and convince themselves they don't fit the image of what an equestrian is supposed to be. Maybe they feel too old, too young, too tall, too short, too big, too small, or like they don't have the same opportunities or background as the people around them. But the truth is, there is no one definition of what a rider looks like."

Your age. Your height. Your gender. Your size. Your background. None of it determines whether you belong. What determines it is showing up. The willingness to keep learning. To keep chasing what makes you happy. To take up space that you already deserve to take.

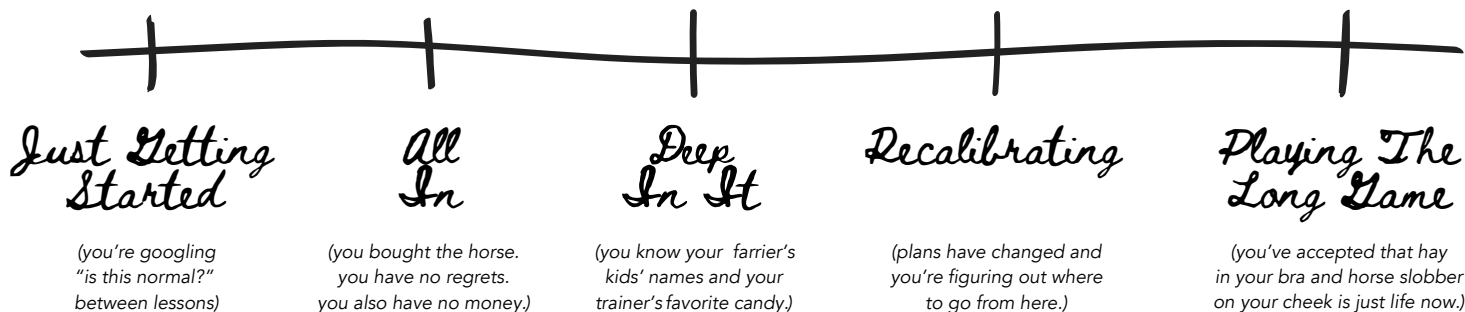
"Belonging comes from showing up," Aria said, "and allowing yourself to take up space." ★



BLAIR BUSH is the founder and editor-in-chief of Modern Amateur Magazine. A lifelong horse person with a roundabout path to get here, she grew up riding gaited horses, stepped away from the sport for nearly two decades and returned at 33 with a switch to English riding. A brief detour through the hunter ring eventually led her to eventing, where she found her people. She is currently focused on dressage and working toward her USDF Bronze Medal—which, she will tell you, is a five-year plan and not a suggestion. She is based in Atlanta, Georgia.



Where Are You In The Long Game?



HOW SHE MAKES IT WORK

Somewhere between a full-time job, a real budget, and a horse with opinions, she figured out how to make it work. We're not saying it's easy. We're not saying it's logical. We're saying she does it anyway, and she was kind enough to tell us how.



WANT TO SHARE YOUR STORY?

Scan the QR code to submit yours for a future issue!

AGE: 37

ANNUAL INCOME: \$60K

LEASE/OWN: neither right now!

DISCIPLINE: English, eventing

REGION: Southeast USA

I grew up riding gaited horses and then took a break while I got my career in order. When I came back to riding in my mid 30s, things were much different and I basically had to relearn everything from scratch. I fell in love with eventing and helping horses use their bodies to their fullest potential.

Lately I've been really enjoying learning about groundwork and conditioning while I shop for a new barn (we're in the process of moving to a new area). I've been helping a former barn mate rehab her OTTB. The work is really rewarding and I'm learning a lot about how to take care of horses outside of riding. Hopefully I will find a lease at a new barn soon, though...I do miss riding. Eventually I would like to own my own horse (wouldn't we all!) but finances make that a long-term goal right now.



PHOTOGRAPH OF ABBI EDWARDS & FLAME BY
BLAIR BUSH
@blairbusheq

GUIDE
to the
SHOW
RING**Advice by SARAH THOMANN****Photograph by CORA WILLIAMSON**

For years, the show office at most venues has been cast with a dark shadow by exhibitors. It's whispered about at in-gates and barn aisles, with many making the conscious decision to avoid it entirely. Here at *Modern Amateur* we have heard the whispers and we want to change that mindset! Our goal is to make the show office the happiest place on the show grounds. Have a question about a class, your bill or even what to do around town? The show office is your place to find all that out and more. In this section we'll cover your most asked questions when you're attending shows and get the answers to help you feel confident out of the saddle too. One reader wrote in asking:

"How do you groom for yourself but also stay clean enough to impress your judge when showing?"

Got A Question?



Scan the QR code to submit your question for our next issue!

DEAR READER:

Those of us who are weekend horse show warriors feel your pain...but we have answers! One of the best kept secrets I've found over the years is baby wipes. They come in handy when you need to wipe off your horse's slobber from your coat or breeches in a pinch and don't leave behind any residue. They are a must have in a ring bag regardless of your division.

The next piece of advice I can share is having a microfiber towel with you at all times. Need to wipe off your boots? The towel can handle that. Need to wipe some green slobber off your horse before the jog? The towel is your go to. Most in-gates don't mind holding your ring bag with them when you go in for your ride. If you're flying solo, be sure to pack your bag with all the show ring essentials you can think of and ask your in-gate if it's okay to leave it in their booth while you show.

For those chilly mornings when you have to flat and lunge before the sun comes up make sure you have an extra layer to throw over your show shirt—something you can quick change out and into to help your white shirt stay crisp. If you don't have time to change into your show boots before your ride time, there are little rubber booties that you can purchase to put over the foot of your tall boot to keep clean!

BUILT TO Last

There is a Facebook group called PS of Sweden Unicorns, and if you know, you know.

It is a resale group, technically: a place to buy, sell, and trade pieces from a Swedish tack brand that makes saddle pads, matching sets, and accessories in colorways that have inspired what can only be described as a devoted collector culture. If you have ever paid more than you would like to admit for a secondhand saddle pad, the Unicorns group may already be a significant part of your life. If you have not, the existence of this group and the passion behind it will tell you something true about what PS of Sweden means to the people who love it.

The group was founded by Megan Gaunt, who has been in this world long enough to know exactly which colors drive people to set alarms, and whose years of community building, direct feedback, and relationship with the brand ultimately opened a door that three other women were able to walk through. Amanda Pope was on the other side of that door: a collector who came

The Incredible True Story of the Riders Who Put Their Stories Into PS of Sweden's Most Personal Collection Yet

by
BLAIR BUSH

photographs courtesy of
AMANDA COX, ELENA FIELDS,
MEGAN GAUNT,
& CRYSTAL WILCOX

back to horses after a 20-year absence and discovered, to her own amusement, that the matchy-set era was entirely her era. So was Elena Fields, who started buying pieces in 2021, the same year she brought home her Westphalian mare LuLu and who has since become the kind of collector who can tell you exactly what makes a PS of Sweden polo wrap different from anything else on the market. And Crystal Wilcox, who came to the brand in 2023 and was taught most of what she knows by Amanda herself. This is how these things tend to work in a community built on the shared, slightly obsessive love of the same thing.

All four of them are devoted collectors. All four of them understand the PS of Sweden catalog the way most people understand their own wardrobes: intuitively, emotionally, and with strong opinions about what belongs and what doesn't. This past year, they each designed saddle pads for PS of Sweden's The Original Monogram collection, choosing not only the color but the quote stitched into the spine. This line of text would travel out into the world on the back of every pad sold, carried by riders who now can know the story behind it.

THE RECIPE

To understand what all this means, you need a little context about the brand. PS of Sweden was founded by Karen Uro, who started by making browbands by hand; soon halters, bridles, coolers, and pads joined the collection. The early pieces were bespoke in the way that small, careful, one-person operations tend to be, and collectors sought them out and held onto them, which was ultimately reflected in the resale prices. When Uro sold the company in 2021, she stayed through 2022 to help guide the transition. The years that followed were a recalibration: new ownership, new leadership, and the kind of growing pains that come with rebuilding something that had meant a great deal to a great many people.

None of this was lost on the women in the Unicorns group, who gave specific, honest feedback: the wither pad foam didn't fill the pad like it used to; the colors had gone soft when they should have stayed vibrant; the brand that once made you feel like you were getting something rare was evolving in ways that didn't always land with longtime collectors.

What PS of Sweden did with that feedback, eventually, was reach out to Megan. Representatives of the brand had been in the group. They had seen the resale prices on older pieces and the passionate response to the earliest releases, and they wanted to understand what made those collections resonate so deeply. Megan contacted Amanda. Amanda brought in Crystal and Elena. And from there, over the course of roughly a year, they worked together on the newest community-inspired collection.

BUILDING THE COLLECTION

The color process began with the brand sharing a palette for consideration. The collaborators assessed it, appreciated the gesture, and then went in an entirely different direction.

They built a group chat. They sent screenshots. They made collages of color options and tweaked them until all four worked together as a set, a collection that could stand alone or hang side by side in a tack room and feel intentional. There were priorities, and they were non-negotiable: a hot pink, because the original Monogram Azalea was beloved in a way that twenty years of new releases hadn't touched, and someone needed to honor that. A sapphire blue, because that's Amanda's color, and has been since before she had a word for why. A yellow, because PS of Sweden had never done a yellow quite like this one, bright and uncompromising, and Crystal was willing to set aside her signature purple to give people something they didn't know they were missing. And a warm coral for Elena, who had been spending quiet afternoons in the barn with

LuLu, putting polo wraps on her legs while she fell asleep in the crossties, learning, slowly, what a horse could mean to you when you weren't riding her.

When it came time for the quotes, the collaborators each went looking on their own. They had submitted ideas earlier in the process thinking PS of Sweden would choose from a list. Instead, they were given complete latitude, and what each woman chose reflected not just her colorway but the specific texture of her life with horses at that moment in time.



PS OF SWEDEN'S ORIGINAL MONOGRAM COLLECTION, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Sunburst Sorbet, Pink Guava, Sapphire Crush, Hot Hibiscus



◀ Elena's mare, LuLu, wearing Guava Pink

Crystal's mare, Basil, wearing Sunburst Sorbet ▶



Amanda and her gelding, Luke

“When you can't do anything else, you dress your horse.”

CRYSTAL WILCOX



Crystal's mare Belle wearing Sunburst Sorbet

LET'S DANCE

Amanda's quote is “Let's Dance.” She came back to horses the way a lot of us do: quietly, after a long time away, because life felt incomplete without them. Twenty years had passed since she'd last ridden regularly. She had spent those years as an ER nurse, working in one of the most demanding, high-stakes environments in medicine, and somewhere along the way the horses fell away. Not dramatically. Just gradually, the way things do when life fills in the gaps.

When she came back, she made a promise to her husband: no jumping. A past injury had made that a reasonable concession, and she was willing to make it. Which meant that dressage, the discipline she had found hopelessly boring as a kid, was suddenly the only game in town. She had a specific memory of herself at eleven years old, eyes rolling through a dressage test on a pony, the kind of memory that made her laugh at her own younger self. Twenty years later, she was back in a dressage arena, and she was obsessed.

She bought a horse. Then she bought a baby horse named Luke. Her husband, trying to explain what Luke meant to her, reached for the most honest comparison he had: his fishing boat. Not a fancy one, just a boat he can take out on the lake. The boat is his, in the particular way that some things are just yours, and Luke, he said, is hers. It was the right metaphor. She knew it the moment he said it.

Dressage, it turns out, is not boring. It is, she will tell you, extraordinarily hard. But she is learning to love the hard parts, and “Let's Dance” arrived fully formed before she had finished forming the thought. It was just immediately apparent. She didn't have to workshop it.

TWO HEARTS BEATING AS ONE

Elena's quote is “Two Hearts Beating As One.” She bought LuLu in 2021 with all the plans you make when you finally have your own horse: the training, the partnership, the slow accumulation of something great. LuLu was young and willing and full of potential. And then she went lame. Not long after

Elena brought her home, it became clear that something was wrong, the result of being worked too hard by a trainer who hadn't understood her. The diagnostics took time. The prognosis required patience. And the riding plan went on hold indefinitely.

What Elena did during that time, and what ended up meaning more than she expected, was showing up anyway. She bought things for LuLu. She groomed her. She learned which parts of LuLu's body she didn't like being touched and which ones made her close her eyes and lean in. She discovered that LuLu loved having her legs brushed, loved having polo wraps put on, would practically fall asleep in the crossties while Elena worked. Those quiet afternoons, the ones that had no purpose beyond presence, were when Elena fell in love with her horse.

She organized a photo shoot at the barn: brought all her PS of Sweden pieces out, invited other boarders whose horses were also on rest, made an afternoon of it. A friend of hers had an older Arabian who couldn't be ridden anymore but loved to be groomed and dressed up. They spent the day doing exactly that, just being with their horses in the particular, unhurried way that lameness recovery demands. It was, Elena says, therapeutic, not just for her and LuLu but for everyone who showed up.

LuLu is fine now. She's been fine for a while. But Elena still reads her the quote before putting the pad on her back before a ride. She holds it up. LuLu looks at it. Elena says she can tell she's listening.

CHERISH EVERY MOMENT

Crystal's quote is "Cherish Every Moment." Her horse Belle is 27 years old. They have been together for 13 of them. Belle came to Crystal the way a lot of heart horses do: through a chain of connections that in retrospect looks like inevitability, but in the moment looked like chance. Crystal had wanted horses her whole life. Her parents never sprung for lessons; instead she grew up trail riding at summer camp once a year, standing next to friends' horses and being told she couldn't ride them, petting them occasionally and calling it enough when it wasn't. When she was finally in a financial position to do something about it, she started leasing a horse and taking lessons at an

eventing barn. One of her closest friends was the reason she ended up there. That same friend eventually connected her with Belle.

Belle was an off-the-track Thoroughbred, and she was, by any honest measure, too much horse for where Crystal was at the time. Even at 27, Belle still carries herself like she's six: opinionated, energetic, not entirely convinced the world isn't going to ask something of her at any moment. Crystal was not ready for her. Crystal and Belle were ready for each other, which is a different thing, and they grew up together inside that distinction.

"You sink or swim," Crystal says, "and we swam."

She was thinking about Belle's age during the collaboration: the specific, quiet weight of realizing that the time you have with a horse is finite, and that you are closer to the end of it than the beginning. The quote came from that reckoning, from a conversation she was having with herself about what it means to really be present with an animal who has been your partner for over a decade. Every ride. Every quiet moment in the field. Every morning she walks out and Belle raises her head and nickers.

“It wasn't just another collaboration. It felt like coming full circle.”

MEGAN GAUNT

When the pads finally arrived, Belle had developed severe cellulitis. She wasn't fit to ride, and the recovery was slow: six weeks of careful management before she was herself again. But the pads were there, and they were beautiful, and Crystal did what you do when you can't do anything else. She dressed her up. She took the teaser photo for the collection with Belle standing squarely in the pad, her leg still slightly swollen, looking directly at the camera with an expression that could only be described as cooperative. "When you can't do anything else," Crystal says, "you dress your horse."

SUCCESS IS A JOURNEY, NOT A DESTINATION

Megan's color is called Hot Hibiscus, and it sold out faster than anything PS of Sweden had moved in years. This was not an accident.

Megan has seven horses, all at home, and she will tell you she doesn't ride as much as she used to. Her relationship with horses started the way the best ones often do: not with a lesson or a goal or a program, but with a grandmother who used to take her to feed some local horses when she was little. Standing in a field with an older woman and horses that didn't belong to either of them. That was where it started. She got her first pony on her seventh birthday. She has never fully left.

She has been a collector since the early Monogram days, when PS of Sweden releases felt like events and the colorways felt chosen rather than produced. She built the Unicorns group because she understood what the brand meant to people, and she understood it from the inside, as a collector who had watched the early pieces become the things people searched for in resale listings with the kind of patience and determination usually reserved for something much more important. When the brand shifted, she watched it with the specific grief of someone who knew exactly what was being lost.

Hot Hibiscus was her way of going back to the beginning. The original Monogram Azalea was the colorway that defined the early days of the collection for a generation of collectors: bold, immediately recognizable, the kind of color that made you feel like you'd gotten your hands on something. Megan didn't want to replicate it exactly. She wanted to honor it, to give it a new life without erasing what it had been. Same vibrant energy. Its own identity. A bridge between what the brand had been and what she believed, and hoped, it was becoming again. The quote she chose for her pad reflects that perspective exactly: "Success Is A Journey, Not A Destination." For Megan, this collection was never about a single release or a sell-out moment. It was about what comes next, for the brand and for the community that never stopped believing in it.

"It wasn't just another collaboration," she says. "It felt like coming full circle."

When the collection was released and the photos started appearing, horses wearing something she had helped design out in the world, ridden and groomed and cared for by people who had no idea who she was, she says it was surreal. She hopes people see the collection as a celebration of the community that has kept this brand alive through its quieter years. She hopes they understand that behind every colorway is a real story, a real person, a real horse. She would know. She built the room where those stories get told.

THE BEGINNING OF A GOLDEN ERA

This creative group was very specific with PS of Sweden about what they wanted. The wither pad needed to be softer, more moldable, the way the older Monograms had been. The Synthermax lining needed to breathe, especially for riders in Georgia, Texas, and other places where summer is not a metaphor. They pushed for the kind of quality that drives scarcity, not the kind of production volume that trains customers to wait for the sale. They wanted people to need to set alarms again, to feel that particular urgency of a release that might be gone before you finish your morning coffee.

"Your target audience is not the professionals," Amanda observed. "Nobody cares what they're wearing. Your target audience is amateurs. Adult amateurs. We're the ones who want to dress up our horses."

The broader equestrian industry has been slow to arrive at this understanding. Brands still run surveys asking amateur riders which professional athletes inspire them, missing entirely that for most of us, inspiration looks like a barn friend who kept riding through a hard year, or a trainer who told you the truth when it would have been easier not to. The stories that actually matter to us are not the ones at the top of the sport. They're the ones in the cross-ties on a Tuesday morning.

“Your target audience is
adult amateurs
We're the ones who want to
dress up our horses.”

AMANDA COX

These four women know that. And when PS of Sweden handed them a rare and unusual thing, a chance to make something that was genuinely theirs, they reached back into the most honest parts of their lives with horses and pulled out what was there: a nurse who found her boat. A woman who learned to love her horse in the absence of riding her. A rider reckoning quietly with borrowed time. A collector who remembered what it felt like to want something that might not be there if you waited.

Hot Hibiscus, Pink Guava, Sapphire Crush, Sunburst Sorbet. Four colors, four quotes, four women who understood the assignment better than anyone could have anticipated. They are out there now, on horses in arenas and on trails and in fields, worn by riders who will know the stories stitched into the spines. The amateur rider has always had something worth saying; she's just rarely been asked. Consider this a beginning. ★

THE PS OF SWEDEN ORIGINAL MONOGRAM COLLECTION IS AVAILABLE AT [PSOFSWEDEN.COM](https://psofsweden.com)

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less than
1%

Share of USEF registered members who identify as Black riders.

Source: USEF membership data, cited across multiple publications.

41%

of horse owners are over 45.

Source: AHP Equine Industry Survey

55%

Individual/amateur rider segment's share of the global equestrian equipment market in 2024.

Source: GM Insights market report

\$28.8B

Economic contribution of the horse show segment to the U.S. economy.

Source: AHC 2017 Economic Impact Study.

**10-16
MILES**

Distance the average feral horse covers daily, primarily through grazing.

Source: feral horse behavior research, consistent across multiple studies.

60-90%

Performance horses estimated to have gastric ulcers, depending on discipline and management.

Source: AAEP / equine gastric ulcer research

\$1.8B

Global horse tack equipment market value in 2026, projected to reach \$2.72 billion by 2035.

Source: MarkWide Research

**2.2
MILLION**

Jobs supported by the U.S. equine industry, up 33% from 1.7 million in 2017.

Source: AHC 2023 Economic Impact Study

BY THE NUMBERS



The AUTUMN edit

Curated for the season.
Not sponsored, not affiliated. Just genuinely good.

1. Free Ride Equestrian Knit Beanie in Green \$20 | shopfre.com

It's a great beanie for \$20 and the leather patch keeps it from looking like it came free with a horse show entry. One size. Leave one in your car. You'll be glad it's there.

2. Thiandro Equestrian Airflow Mock Neck in Cypress \$68 | thiandroequestrian.com

Perforated, lightweight, and breathable enough that you'll forget you're wearing a long sleeve. The mock neck makes it look like you made an effort. Size up if you prefer things a little less fitted.

3. Premier Equine Maurizia Riding Boots \$230 | gallop-store.com

Handmade leather, lace-up front, soft from the first wear. That last part matters more than it sounds. The cognac is the color to get if you want something that reads warm and slightly interesting instead of just traditional. Size up if you're between sizes, they run a little small.

4. Equestrian Stockholm Satin Ear Bonnet in Chestnut \$69.95 | equestrianstockholm.com

Crocheted cotton with a satin front and elastic ears that reduce noise and keep bugs from becoming your horse's whole personality mid-ride. Designed to match the pad below. Buy them together or don't, but they're better as a set.

5. Sync Equestrian Euro Suede Full Seat Pro Breeches in Desert \$157 | syncequestrian.com

Suede that actually stretches. Lined black on the inside. Deep pockets that fit your actual phone, not a flip phone from 2009. The Desert colorway is a warm tan that works with basically everything in this spread. They also repel dirt and hay.

6. Equestrian Stockholm Jump Satin Saddle Pad in Chestnut \$119.95 | equestrianstockholm.com

Smooth satin finish, classic quilting, and ES's High IQ Cool Comfort lining, which wicks moisture and dries fast. The Chestnut is warm without being loud. It photographs really well in fall light, which is not a reason to buy a saddle pad, but it doesn't hurt.



AMATEUR HOUR

— with —
JESSICA
PAQUETTE

photograph courtesy of
HANNAH WAGNER

Jessica Paquette can call a race in real time at speeds most people can barely track. She can name every horse on the card, clock a fraction of a second, and keep a grandstand full of people hanging on her voice. What she couldn't do, when her horse Emilio got hurt last year and the show season they'd been building toward evaporated, was figure out what came next.

"It was kind of like an existential moment," she says. "What do I want this next part of my equestrian experience to look like?"

The answer: a microphone.

Paquette is the only female Thoroughbred race caller in North America, announcing at Parx Racetrack in Bensalem, Pennsylvania. She has been in the horse racing industry long enough to have been the public face of a racetrack on one of its worst days: the kind of day where you give the sound bites and keep your composure in front of the cameras, and then, once the reporters leave, you go find a horse to sit with. Off the track, she is something the racing world rarely accounts for: an adult amateur, doing it for love, with three horses of her own.

The podcast she launched out of that uncertain moment is called *Amateur Hour with Jessica Paquette*. "I love horse showing," she says, "but I view it as a vacation with my best friend, which is my horse—not anything else. That attitude does not really fit with a lot of these programs."

It fits a lot of riders, though. The adult amateur who goes to local shows once a year, or not at all. The one who is still figuring out what her equestrian life looks like after an injury, a barn change, a horse who can't do what he used to. The one who loves horses as horses, not as equipment—and who is starting to notice how rarely that version of the story gets told.

Amateur Hour launched in March 2026 and releases new episodes every Monday. The show covers ground that most equestrian media doesn't: the real economics of the sport, the client/trainer dynamic, what it takes to report bad behavior at a show, how to rebuild confidence after a setback. Guests range from USEF officials and A-circuit trainers to working amateurs who are still figuring it out.

Paquette knows that feeling well. She has three horses of her own: a geriatric hunter, a jumper coming back from in-



jury, and a retired racehorse she promised a home to years before she could afford one. Trippi, her 22-year-old hunter, has been hers for 16 years. He is, by her account, an animal with a formidable sense of self and an equally formidable sense of humor. They still take lessons together. They walk and trot. He still teaches her things.

“Everything I am as a horse person is because of him,” she says. “He doesn’t owe me a single thing.”

Then there is Emilio, whose injury sent her searching for something new, and whose story is also a quiet indictment of that culture. It made her reevaluate how she wanted to do horses and understand the ways in which she can be a better advocate for them.

And then there is Puget Sound: the third horse, the one she made a promise to years ago in a stall at Suffolk Downs on the day the casino decision came down and her racetrack’s future went dark. She kept that promise across years and state lines and a pandemic, pulling him off a trailer in the early days of COVID with a bone-on-bone ankle and untreated EPM, and settling him into what has become a very comfortable retirement at her best friend’s farm in New Hampshire.

She didn’t start the podcast to talk about any of this, exactly. She started it because she needed somewhere to work through what equestrian life looks like when the plan changes, and because she suspected she wasn’t the only one asking. She was correct.

“The horse industry doesn’t exist without the amateur,” she says, “and I’m kind of tired of being overlooked and not having our stories told.”

Amateur Hour with Jessica Paquette drops every Monday, wherever you listen to podcasts. ★

CAN'T WAIT TO LISTEN?

Scan the QR code with your smartphone's camera to hear the latest episode!

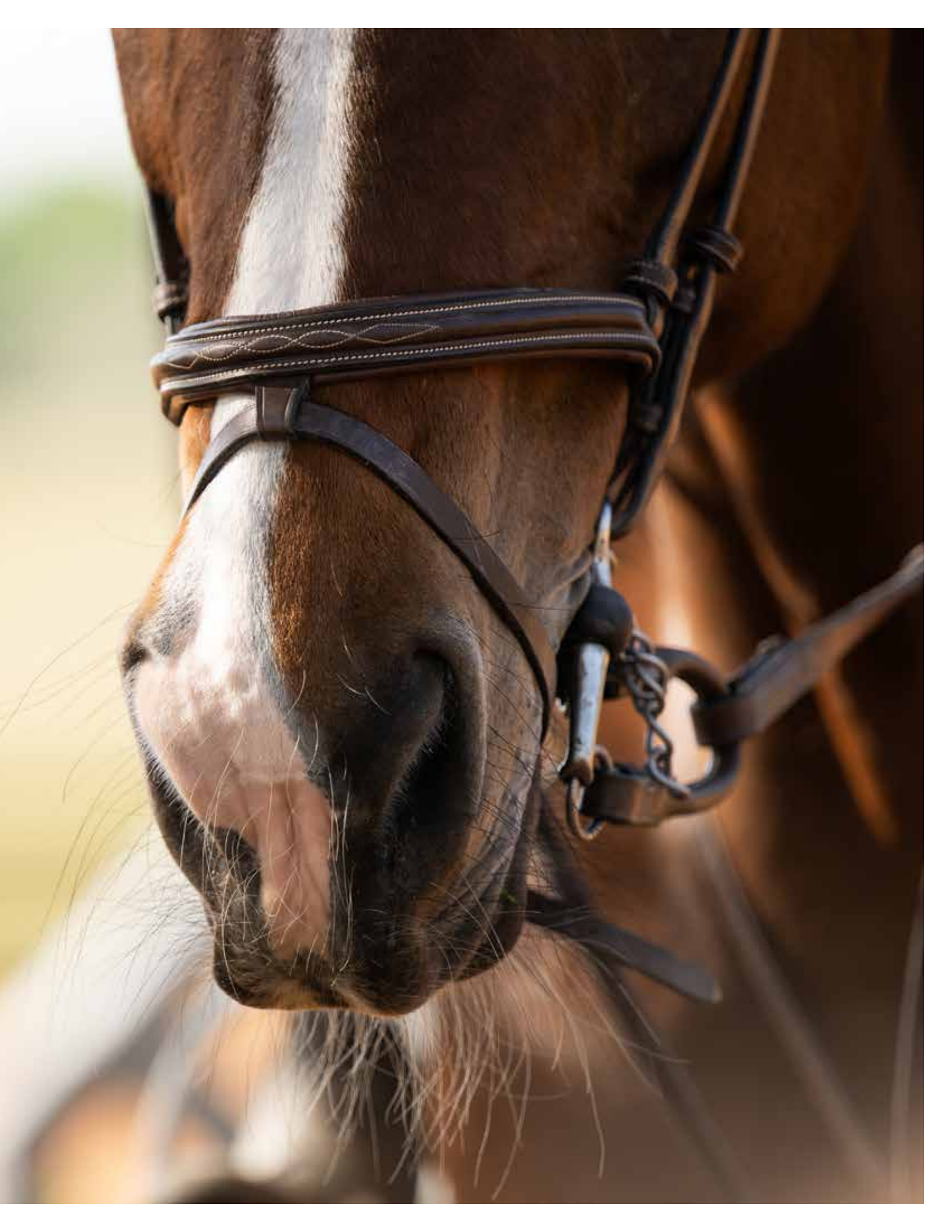




PHOTOGRAPH BY

CORA WILLIAMSON of *Cora Williamson Photography*

@cora.williamson_photography



IN THE RING



Life *of a* Show *{girl}* Secretary

4:30 AM

The alarm goes off. I peel myself out of bed and start running through the day's schedule before my feet hit the floor. I'm a horse show secretary, and it's Saturday, which means we're going to be busy.

6:30 AM

The office door unlocks and trainers trickle in with their students, ready to change classes or drop off missing paperwork. I do a few add/scratches, pull out a grounds map and start highlighting the trailer parking area for those who have parking questions.

Then a frantic mom sits down across from me. Her trainer sent her in. She's never been to a horse show before, but her daughter is thrilled to be here with their new pony. She's got a list of questions and she's not sure I can help with any of them. I give her my warmest smile for this hour of the morning and ask to see the list. I tell her not to panic. We'll get through every single one in time for her to cheer her daughter on at the ring. The relief is immediate. She says she was warned about the office, but we seem so nice! I tell her what I tell everyone: the office is a safe space for questions, and we want people to come in and see us.

Article & Photographs by SARAH THOMANN

Most of us have a complicated relationship with the show office. We go in when we have to, hand over our paperwork, try not to take too long. We don't think much about what happens in there between our visits, or who's managing the twelve other things that keep a horse show running while we're focused on our own class. Sarah Thomann thinks about all of it, because it's her job to.

Here's what her Saturday actually looks like.



8:00 AM

The rings have officially started and the morning rush dies down. I check my basket: 20 add/scratches, re-spun the order for a stakes class I need to run out to the ring, two state membership applications to file, and a new horse entered in the system. I grab my sunglasses, the staple gun I keep in my desk for exactly these situations, and head out the door.

8:45 AM

I'm still out of the office. I've been stopped by two clients with class rule questions, a steward whose radio might be dead, and an ingate crew that needs help sorting ribbons for the derby. Somewhere in the middle of all that, I run into the pony mom from 6:30; her daughter won her class. She was able to answer every question the trainer threw at her. I congratulate them both and keep moving.

9:30 AM

Our first early checkout of the day. Did you know you can close out before you've finished showing so you don't get stuck in the Sunday rush? As long as your trainer has done their splits for the week, we're happy to help. A trainer sits down with about ten minutes of her hectic day to spare. I start pulling her entries while she flips through her binder of checks and credit card numbers her clients left for this exact reason. We review statements together, sort out who owes what, flag a prize money winner who needs a W-9 on file, and I get her out the door in eight minutes. A whole barn just got a stress-free weekend.

11:30 AM

I'm about to grab lunch when a call comes over the radio. The jumper ring judge doesn't have a lunch form on his clipboard. I'm in the clipboard room before I've finished processing the sentence, keys in hand, yelling something along the lines of "I'm heading into the outside world" as I run out the door. I drop the form with the kitchen, then get a call on my cell: Hunter 2 needs cards for the medal—everyone wants to know how they placed. I head over. The judge is in the middle of a flat phase, so I stand quietly in the corner until he's done. He radios the announcer with scores and hands me a stack of cardstock. It's an exchange we both know well. No words needed, just a clean handoff.

12:00 PM

Back in the office, I'm inputting the medal results that everyone is waiting for when someone appears in front of my desk. Their horse's membership isn't listed correctly. This is one of those database tangles that's gotten more common since USEF and USHJA split their systems. Exhibitors used to handle everything in one place, and now there's an extra step that's easy to miss. I walk them through it, make sure their points will count, and send them on their way. It takes two minutes, but it's the kind of thing that can make or break your name getting on a list for indoors.

2:00 PM

The jumper stake is about to start. The rider count has gone up to thirty entries. I pull up the live feed at my desk so I can time when to head out for the presentation. Then we get slammed with early checkouts and the feed becomes background noise as I answer constant questions. I glance at the clock, grab the radio: "Have you started the jump off yet?" Rider three of five is on course. Sunglasses. Keys. Out the door.



3:30 PM

I help the ingate pack up after the ribbon presentation, collect cards from the judge, and joke with the riders about how much better their cocktail is going to taste tonight. A rider asks to see the breakdown from their round. They think their score was higher than announced. I let them know I'll need to get the steward involved so the judge can walk them through it. The results are like a top-secret file not everyone has clearance for. Yes, anyone can log in and find the results of the class but if you really want to see a points breakdown it's not that simple. The rider assures me they want to see the breakdown, I ask for a steward to meet us at the office, they take over once they get there and assist the rider with their questions. Getting answers is never a problem if you ask.

4:30 PM

A group of kids in jodhpurs and bows bounces over to my desk. "Do you have any more saddle pads or fidget spinners for prizes?" They're holding up their ribbons from earlier. I congratulate every single one of them and their ponies, then slip into the ribbon room to find the best prizes we've got. This is the part of the job I love that not many people get to see. These kids are thrilled to be here! They want to shower their ponies with mints from the vendor shops, but they're just as excited about being able to say "look what I won." I restock the prize shelf while I'm in there and look out the window on my way back. The kids are showing off their prizes to their trainers and families, hugging their ponies, beaming. Not a care in the world. The horse show bug has been planted. I've just watched another lifelong rider get made.

5:00 PM

A rider comes in. They've lost their back number. Vanished off their tack trunk, but they still have to show tomorrow. I grab our set of unclaimed numbers—someone scratched, someone entered the wrong week, a horse sold before it shipped in—and start one of my favorite side projects: arts and crafts. I cut and rearrange digits to match what the rider was originally assigned, then staple them together. A little trick we do: edges facing outward so they won't catch on your show coat!

6:00 PM

I'm getting to my car after another Saturday. I think about the people who walked in nervous and walked out confident. The pony mom. The rider who didn't know the cross-entry rule. The kids who just wanted to show off their ribbons.

The show office isn't there to intimidate anyone. It's the most helpful place on the grounds, and it costs nothing to be the person who makes it feel that way. So next time you're at a show, stop in and say hi to your secretary. It might just change how you experience yours. ★



SARAH THOMANN grew up just 5 minutes down the road from HITS Saugerties where she watched her first Grand Prix and decided horses would always be a part of her life. She went on to attend Alfred University where she earned her Bachelor of Arts in Communications. When she's not writing articles you can usually find her at the barn riding, working on her tack business and spending time with her cats and dog.

Horse Girl Horoscopes

*The stars have consulted your ride times
and have some thoughts.*

ARIES (March 21 – April 19) September is going to make you feel invincible, which means you're going to sign up for something you haven't fully thought through. Say yes anyway. The thing you're slightly underprepared for is usually the thing that moves you forward. Your horse is ready even if your trailer isn't.

TAURUS (April 20 – May 20) The cooler air is coming and your horse is going to lose his entire mind about it, which you will find charming for approximately four days before it gets old. October asks you to be patient with the process. The good news: patience is basically your whole thing.

GEMINI (May 21 – June 20) You'll start fall with a very clear riding goal. By mid-October you'll have pivoted to a completely different riding goal. Both are valid. The stars just want you to write one of them down and keep it somewhere you'll actually look.

CANCER (June 21 – July 22) There is a horse at your barn that is not yours, and this fall you are going to become extremely attached to it. You will bring it treats. You will worry about it. You may have already started. The horse knows, Cancer. The horse absolutely knows.

LEO (July 23 – August 22) Fall is your season in every way that matters: the light is golden, your jacket is new, and your horse's coat is shiny AF. November is going to ask you to keep showing up when no one is watching. You will, because you love this more than you love being seen doing it.

VIRGO (August 23 – September 22) You have already thought about blanket rotation. It is September. The first blanket night is weeks away. This is fine and normal and exactly who you are, and your horse will be the most appropriately-layered horse at the barn when the time comes.

LIBRA (September 23 – October 22) October is going to present you with a decision about your riding life, something small but real, and you are going to sit with it longer than necessary. The stars are not going to tell you what to decide. They will tell you that either option is fine and the deciding is the hard part, not the outcome.



Photograph by Jess Ogden

SCORPIO (October 23 – November 21) You've identified something specific you want to fix this fall, one thing, and you are going to pursue it with a focus that will make everyone around you mildly uncomfortable. That's okay. Mild discomfort is how things get done. November you will be different than September you, and you'll be the only one who fully understands why.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 – December 21) Something is going to happen in October that completely redirects your energy, and instead of resisting it, you're going to lean in. Your barn friends will not understand. Your horse will be on board immediately. Trust the horse.

CAPRICORN (December 22 – January 19) You're already thinking about next year. That's fine, that's you, but the stars want you to also be here, in this crisp September, on this specific horse, in this exact season of your riding life. The long game is made of moments you didn't rush through.

AQUARIUS (January 20 – February 18) This fall you're going to try something at the barn that you've been quietly thinking about for months. Other people will have opinions. The opinions are not the point. Report back in December

PISCES (February 19 – March 20) The next three months are going to feel significant to you in a way that's hard to articulate, which is very on brand. Something about fall riding, the light, the cold coming in, the way your horse feels underneath you in October, is going to stay with you. Let it.

The Amateur's Horoscope is written by the stars, interpreted by someone who has also forgotten her number at a show. Consult your actual trainer for riding advice. The stars are not responsible for what your horse does at the flower pot.

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