

Recreational Riding the Centered Way

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Baby boomers are getting on horseback, some of them for the first time. These folks who are 40+ are realizing a childhood dream or getting back to a place they were before they had marriage/career/family. These folks love horses. They may have no desire to win blue ribbons or compete in anyway. But they want to ride, ride well, safely and with confidence. They want to go trail riding and tackle hills, rocky outcroppings, twisty wooded areas, skirt the marshes and maybe even splash in a pond or go on a Hunter Pace. They want to learn how to communicate effectively with their partner whether it's a leased horse, a new acquisition or a trusted lesson mount.

Centered Riding fits their needs. Adults have a different perspective on life. They know they are NOT infallible, omnipotent or immortal like many kids under 12. Adults have schedules and responsibilities and car payments. These adults are grateful that there are Centered Riding instructors around

who care about them first, who really want them to understand and know what they are doing and how it affects the horse.

Ring riding is fine for the recreational rider. It's secure with walls or rails, the footing is even and there are few distractions. They can learn to steer and stop and ask the horse to go forward. Most of them have to learn how to think "like a horse" and react in new ways. And they all learn about their bodies. Because Centered Riding focuses on the communication between the rider and the horse through the rider's body awareness a majority of these adult riders say, after suddenly comprehending how an aid works, "Why didn't anyone tell me this/explain this to me when I was riding as a child?" And how about the adult who wants to realize a long put off dream? They may never have ridden as a child for any number of reasons. Their kids may now be in high school or college or these adults may have achieved security in their job so they can begin to think about things they've always wanted to do. First time adult riders frequently carry a lot of physical baggage around and Centered Riding addresses it all. Sometimes a rider's weight or a physical handicap or old injury adds extra layers to this baggage. And again Centered Riding has been designed to help riders figure out the best ways to use their bodies.

Figuring out one's building blocks can take the scare out of sitting way up there. Finding the ground under one's feet makes learning to post or jog much easier than bouncing around in the saddle. Centering enables turns without tipping and learning to breathe from the "bottom up" keeps riders from turning blue and falling off.

And then there is the great outdoors. The transition from indoor lessons to outdoor ring is full of wind, weather, heat, cold, mud and vagaries of the equine who may or may not notice the neighbor's cat traversing a path. But it is a glorious place and I can just see dreams of galloping across sandy beaches or romantic rides through wine country taking place. The outdoor reinforces the need for grounding and centering and soft eyes. The bigger the arena the easier it is for the horse to wander. If you don't have that clear intent about where you are going, and HOW you are going you will be reduced to passenger status.



Horses change when going from the indoor to the outdoor arenas. In the 2009 Yearbook, you will read how Centered Riding instruction can prepare you for outside recreational riding and what techniques can help you to overcome natural obstacles that may come your way.

Photos: Top Left - Rachel and Roadrunner aka Beep on a trail ride, Bottom Right - Jacqui and Gwen after their first ride.