Issue Three 2017

THE ICELANDIC HORSE

QUARTERLY



Official Publication of the United States Icelandic Horse Congress
Member Association of FEIF (International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations)

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THE USIHC MISSION

- To promote the knowledge of the Icelandic horse within the United States and its correct use as a competition and riding horse.
- To keep a registry of purebred Icelandic horses in the United States.
- To facilitate communication among all USIHC members.
- To represent the United States in FEIF.

The U.S. Icelandic Horse Congress is a member of FEIF (www.feif.org), the International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations, representing the national Icelandic horse associations of 21 countries. FEIF governs competition activities and regulates the breeding and registration of Icelandic horses throughout the world outside of Iceland.

The USIHC was formed in 1987 by representatives of the U.S. Icelandic Horse Federation and the International Icelandic Horse Association to meet the FEIF rule that only one association from each country is allowed to represent the breed.





Photo by Martina Gates

WHY JOIN THE USIHC?

LEARN

As the owner or rider of an Icelandic horse, you chose a very special breed with its own culture and history. It is important to learn about the breed's unique traits, capabilities, and needs, so that you and your Icelandic horse will have a happy relationship and it will live a healthy and long life in a country far from its origin. As a USIHC member, you have a wealth of information at your fingertips and a personal connection to the best experts in the country.

You receive *The Icelandic Horse Quarterly,* a 52-page all-color magazine, four times a year. All issues since 2008 are indexed and available online.

You have free access to WorldFengur, the worldwide database of all registered Icelandic horses. About 450,000 horses, alive and deceased, are included, with pedigrees, offspring, ownership, and evaluation and competition results. Some horses even have photos and videos. WorldFengur is an invaluable tool for all Icelandic horse breeders and very interesting for the rest of us. Go to "Search Horses" on the USIHC website and find any US-registered Icelandic horse by its number, name, or farm name to link to WorldFengur.

You can take part in—and even help create—educational seminars and teaching programs. For example, the USIHC Education committee developed and now administers the Riding Badge Program for pleasure and competition riders of all ages. On the USIHC website you can find links to certified trainers who are USIHC members and can help you get the best out of your Icelandic horse. The Education Committee also offers Sport Judges Seminars for those wanting to learn more about show rules and how to judge competitions. A $1,000 grant is available to members who complete their certification to become national or international judges.

The USIHC also has a scholarship fund for members who complete their certification to become national or international judges.

CONNECT

Icelandic horses are social animals, and so are their people. The USIHC is the umbrella organization of Regional Clubs all over the U.S.: There are currently 13 active clubs. Find the regional Icelandic riding club in your area through the USIHC website, so that you and your horse can

ride with friends. The USIHC Board has set aside funding for regional clubs to host clinics, schooling shows, sanctioned shows, young horse evaluations, and full breeding shows.

USIHC Youth members can apply to participate in the American Youth Cup or the international FEIF Youth Cup or Youth Camp. These are great events designed to bring young riders together for a week of fun, learning, and competition.

Through the USIHC website, you can sign up for RSS feeds for the Events Calendar or web updates. You can check the membership list to see if your friends are members and when your own membership expires. And you can stay connected through the USIHC Facebook page.

COMPETE

The Icelandic horse has international competition rules: You can compete in the same classes and under the same rules in any of the 19 FEIF member countries and compare your progress with competition riders from around the world.

The USIHC Competition committee adapts these international FEIF rules for American venues and special circumstances, publishing a new set of USIHC Competition Rules each year. These are available on the USIHC website, along with all the tools needed to put on a sanctioned show, such as entry forms, judging forms, judges' cards, and announcers' cards. (These tools are also useful for organizing fun shows and schooling shows.) Also on the website are lists of recommended and prohibited tack and equipment, track sizes, and other information for competition riders.

Sanctioned shows and schooling shows are eligible for USIHC Funding; contact the Competition committee. Show organizers have access to the IceTest software so that eligible scores immediately appear in the U.S. National Ranking; qualified shows can also send scores to the FEIF World Ranking list. Scores are posted on the USIHC website for everyone to see and compare.

Only USIHC members can join the U.S. team at the Icelandic Horse World Championships, held in a FEIF country every other year. If you hope to compete at an international level, see the team recommendations and requirements on the USIHC website. Tryouts for the team are open and are National Ranking events: Anyone can ride for scores and to get feedback from an international judge, whether or not you intend to compete in the World Championships.

PROMOTE

USIHC members promote the Icelandic horse at many equine expositions around the country. The USIHC provides display materials, including brochures and copies of the *Quarterly*. The USIHC Breed Ambassador program rewards members who take their Icelandic horses to all-breed events and shows.

Trainers, breeding farms, and trekking barns can promote their services through the USIHC Farm List in the *Quarterly* and on the website. Stallion owners can promote their stud services through the online USIHC Stallion Book.

And everybody, members or nonmembers, can advertise in the *Quarterly*.

REGISTER

Whether you plan to breed one mare or have a breeding farm, the USIHC Registry and the Breeding committee provide information and services to help you. The Icelandic horse is one of few breeds with international evaluation standards, so that breeding horses from all over the world are judged on the same 10 points of conformation and 10 points of ridden abilities, and all scores are entered into the WorldFengur database. That allows you to compare the quality of your breeding stock with Icelandic horses around the world, both past and present.

USIHC-sanctioned breeding evaluation shows for registered adult horses ages four and up are scheduled by USIHC Regional Clubs and private farms. Breeding shows and seminars are eligible for USIHC funding. All rules and regulations are supplied by the Breeding committee from the international FEIF rules and are available on the USIHC website. Regional Clubs and private farms can also organize Young Horse Assessments for foals to three-year-olds. These assessments also qualify for USIHC funding; contact the Breeding Leader.

In accordance with FEIF rules, the USIHC has adopted stringent tests before a foal can be registered as a purebred Icelandic horse. You can be sure of the parentage of any registered Icelandic horse and know that your registered foals have proof of their value.

You don't have to be a USIHC member to register your Icelandic horse, but by becoming a member you help support this vital USIHC program.

INNOVATE

The USIHC is a member-driven organization. The more active and involved our members are, the stronger the USIHC becomes. Do you have an idea for a project or event that will support the Icelandic horse in America?

Requests for funding for special events and programs can be submitted to the USIHC board of directors and will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Contact the USIHC president for more information.

JOIN US

There are only about 5,800 registered Icelandic horses in the U.S. and the USIHC, at about 625 members, is still a small "pioneer" organization compared to our counterparts in Iceland and Germany. Our committee members and board of directors are all volunteers. Please join us so that the USIHC can, as FEIF's mission states, "bring people together in their passion for the Icelandic horse"!

Yearly membership for an adult is $45; youth memberships are $35; or for a family (two adults, unlimited kids) it is $65. Mail in the form in this magazine or join online at www.icelandics.org/join

QUESTIONS?

USIHC Board members and Committee chairs are here to answer them. For general questions, call or email our information desk or check the website.

Toll free: 866-929-0009
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www.icelandics.org

FEIF'S MISSION: FEIF BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER IN THEIR PASSION FOR THE ICELANDIC HORSE

THE ICELANDIC HORSE QUARTERLY
Issue Three 2017

Official Publication of the United States Icelandic Horse Congress (USIHC), a member association of FEIF (International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations).

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On the cover: Happiness is ... a canter! USIHC member Hannah Huss (right) on Ari from Trail's End is having a great time showing her friend from Iceland, Hrafndís Katla Elíasdóttir on Dagfari frá Blönduosi, the beautiful scenery of West Wind Farm in the Catskill mountains of New York. Photo by Heleen Heyning.

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SEA 2 SHINING SEA

"The USIHC Leisure Riding Committee is extremely pleased to announce the replacement for the retired Pleasure Riding Program," reports committee chair Kristina Behringer. The Sea to Shining Sea Ride is a virtual 10,000-mile ride open to all Congress members and their registered Icelandic horses. The ride began on July 4 at the Statue of Liberty, and will end there on July 3, 2018, visiting 15 landmarks along the way, from Acadia National Park to the St Louis Arch to the Golden Gate Bridge to the Alamo and the Everglades. You can participate as individuals, teams, or USIHC-affiliated clubs in this virtual tour of the United States, logging your hours (which will then be automatically converted to distance at 7 miles-per-hour) every week. Each participant will receive a patch when they log their first hours. Other prizes include t-shirts, tote bags, water bottles, and saddle pads. Join the Sea to Shining Sea Facebook page to share stories and photos and see who is chosen Rider of the Month. For the complete rules, and to register your hours, visit www.icelandics.org/s2ss.



Ayla Green of California and Mári frá Kolgerði qualified to represent the U.S. in the young rider division at the 2017 Icelandic Horse World Championships. Photo by Isaac Dwyer.



Payton Black and Bleikur from Arnarbaeli enjoying a swim in Colorado. Photo by Kathryn Ory of Ory Photography.

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

The 2017 Icelandic Horse World Championships were held August 7-13 in Oirschot, Netherlands, as this issue of the *Quarterly* was at press. In May, the USIHC sport committee released the results of the World Championships tryout videos and World Ranking submissions; the judge was FEIF international sport judge Florian Schneider. Congratulations to Ayla Green, Chrissy Seipolt, and Jenny Melville, who qualified to represent the United States. The *Quarterly* will report on their success in the next issue. For more information on the selection process and on preparing for future championships, see www.icelandics.org/competition/wc_team.

In addition to the three riders, an American-born horse, Marel from Creekside (bred by Barbara Frische and owned by Katrin Taylor Sheehan and Nicole Kempf), has qualified for the breeding division of the 2017 championships. As USIHC Breeding Committee Chair Kydee Sheetz reports, "Ridden by Nicole Kempf, Marel is the highest scoring U.S.-born horse ever, and we are excited to see him on the track in the Netherlands."

AMERICAN YOUTH CUP

The Icelandic Horse American Youth Cup took place June 25 to July 2 at Coast Road Stables in Santa Cruz, CA. Young riders representing California, Wisconsin, Vermont, Alaska, Wyoming, Colorado, Maine, Pennsylvania, and Kentucky spent the week learning, training, and bonding with each other and their wonderful Icelandic horses, while staying in beach-view dorms on the Santa Cruz campus of the University of California. The week culminated in a USIHC-sanctioned show, including FIPO classes as well as classes in Reidleider, Pairs, Drill Team, and the now-infamous cardboard horse competition (which involves both conformation and gait training). Scores from the show are posted at www.icelandics.org/showresults.

Riders attending the American Youth Cup were: Maile Behringer, Payton Black, Jamie Blough, Eva Dykaar, Alicia Flanigan, Shay Harvey, Mary Hedrick, Eden Hendricks, Kajsa Johnson, Zoe Johnson, Jay Maio, Isabelle Maranda, Maria Octavo, Olivia Rasmussen, Karlie Schmutz, Robyn Schmutz, Cameron Tolbert Scott, Grace Strausser, and Haley Werheim.

The group of 19 young riders was split into four teams, led by team leaders Jessica Blough, Julia Hasenauer, Kevin Draeger, and Ayla Green. Riders were instructed on their borrowed horses by trainers Heidi Benson-Green, Ásta Covert, Caeli Cavanaugh, and Laura Benson. The event was organized by Meggin Hendricks with the help of many volunteers, and was sponsored in part by the USIHC Youth Fund and USIHC general funds.



Grace Strausser of Pennsylvania enjoys a quiet moment with Hugljúf frá Vatnsholti at the American Youth Cup. Photo by Charlotte Reilly.



Young riders Amelie Maranda (in front) and Finja Meyer-Hoyt at the NEIHC Open in New York. Photo by Heleen Heyning.

JUDGING SEMINAR

A Sport Judge Seminar with Þorgeir Guðlaugsson took place April 20-23 at Thor Icelandics in Claverack, NY, organized by Leslie Chambers for the Northeast Icelandic Horse Club (NEIHC) and USIHC Education leader Alex Dannenman. "It was an exciting opportunity for Americans to take the seminar and test to become certified as C or B level sport judges," reports Jess Haynsworth of the NEIHC in the Club Updates section of this issue. Twelve people participated in the seminar, six took the test, and two passed on the B-level: congratulations to Jana Meyer and Freija Thye. For information on becoming a sport judge, see www.icelandics.org/sportJudgeMatrix. For dates of future seminars, contact Alex at education@icelandics.org.

2017 SHOW SEASON

Of the seven USIHC-sanctioned shows scheduled for 2017, one—the Flugnirkeppni, held at Winterhorse Park in Eagle, WI on August 26-27—is taking place as this issue of the *Quarterly* goes to press. Results of these earlier shows are available on the USIHC website at www.icelandics.org/showresults: the CIA Spring Open, held April 29-30 at Flying C Ranch in Santa Ynez, CA; the Léttleiki Spring Show, held June 3-4 at Swallowland Farm in Shelbyville, KY; the NEIHC Open, held June 24-25 at Thor Icelandics in Claverack, NY; and the American Youth Cup, held July 1-2 at Coast Road Stables in Santa Cruz, CA.

Still to come are the Léttleiki Icelandics Triple World Ranking and Sanctioned Show at Swallowland Farm in Shelbyville, KY on October 6-8, and the CIA Open Fall Sanctioned Show at Flying C Ranch in Santa Ynez, CA on October 14-15. For more information on sport competition, contact Ásta Covert at competition@icelandics.org.

BREEDERS CLUB WEBSITE

The website of the Gæðingar Club, the first official USIHC-affiliated activity club, is up and running at icebreeders.com. The purpose of the club is to create a setting for all Icelandic horse breeders and those interested in breeding to connect and share. (See the article in this issue of the *Quarterly*.) The website includes listings of farms, stallions and mares, horses for sale, events, and news.

BREEDING SEMINAR

The Gæðingar Club has announced a Breeding Show Seminar and Clinic with Herdís Reynisdóttir, to be held at Bel Di Farm in Washingtonville, NY on September 16-17. Herdís, an international breeding judge with 15 years' experience, will explain the FEIF breeding horse evaluation system, including what the judges look at and why, as well as how to best present your horse for both conformation and in the ridden test. Horses will be unofficially scored. For more information, contact Shannon Fitzgerald (shannonfitz@optonline.net) or Martina Gates (martinagates@mac.com).

YOUNG HORSE ASSESSMENTS

Several assessments for young Icelandic horses (foals aged 21 days to three years) are planned for this fall: on September 14 at Bel Di Farm in New York; on September 17-18 at the Cobbleskill Fairgrounds in Cobbleskill, NY; on September 18 at Aslan's Country Icelandics in Proctor, MN; and on October 6 at Léttleiki Icelandics in Shelbyville, KY. See https://www.icelandics.org/calendar for more information.

BREEDING AWARDS

The qualifications for the two annual USIHC breeding awards have been changed. The Anne Elwell Breeding Award will honor the breeder of the highest evaluated ridden stallion bred in the U.S., while the Caryn Cantella Breeding Award will honor the breeder of the highest evaluated ridden mare bred in the U.S. See https://www.icelandics.org/elwell_award/ and www.icelandics.org/cantella_award/ for full details.

NEW DECALS

"The USIHC Promotion Committee is pleased to announce that new decals are available to all members free of charge," reports committee chair Juli Cole. "These beautiful, full-color decals are great for use on vehicles, trailers, windows, tack trunks—just about anywhere you want to show your pride for your Icelandic horse and your national association." Two decals have been included with each copy of the *Quarterly*



Lynn Wiese riding Hetja vom Pfaffenbuck II at the Léttleiki Spring Show in Kentucky. Photo by Shaila Sigsgaard.



Young riders taking a victory lap at the Léttleiki Spring Show in Kentucky. Photo by Shaila Sigsgaard.

mailed directly to USIHC members. If you receive the e-Quarterly, or would like extra decals, send a request to promotion@icelandics.org. "Please note that the decals are for personal use and not for distribution at events," Juli adds. To hand out at events, the Promotion Committee can supply free USIHC brochures. You can also request copies of the *Quarterly* (as available) to hand out.

BOARD MEETINGS

The USIHC board of directors met by conference call on May 17, June 13, and July 17. No meeting was held in August to allow for World Championships travel. Complete minutes, including the monthly Treasurer's and Secretary's reports, can be found online at www.icelandics.org/bod/minutes. Highlights not already reported upon in the USIHC News section follow:

In May, Andrea Barber and Doug Smith asked to develop a written protocol for proposals to the Board. The document was to include an outline for how committees should work within the structure of the national association, as well as how changes are advanced through the committees to the Board. A detailed draft protocol was submitted at the June meeting and is under discussion.

The directors also discussed the role of the Affiliated Clubs in the Congress and agreed that "the clubs remain autonomous organizations with no direct representation in the national association. The committees are made up of individual members working to maintain the various programs of the national association. There is no current plan to restructure the relationship between the association and clubs or change the committee operations."

Also in May the two issue (six month) restriction on printing the online *Quarterly* was removed, as the Quarterly Committee had requested. USIHC members will be able to immediately print the online version, although non-members will still have to wait to have access.

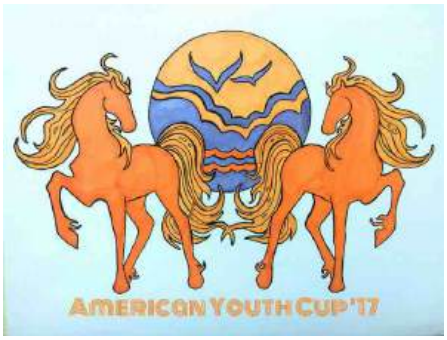
In June, Doug Smith announced that he had completed the revisions needed to make the USIHC website display well on mobile devices. He requested that all committee chairs and board members review the current content of the site and recommend changes. In the future, committee chairs will be reminded each quarter to identify any changes needed to their area of influence.

CORRECTIONS

In Issue Two 2017 of the *Quarterly*, page 17, Jeff Rose authored the update on the Guðmar Clinic at Coralie Denmeade's Tamangur Icelandic Horses.

The photographer responsible for the book cover reproduced on page 12 of the issue is Barbara O'Brien of Barbara O'Brien photography.









Scenes from the American Youth Cup in Santa Cruz, CA (clockwise from top left): Isabelle Maranda rides Tígull frá Hrólfsstaðahelli, while behind her Jamie Blough on Stjarni frá Blöndúosi receives a lesson from Ásta Covert; photo by Eleanor Anderson. Maile Behringer on Harpa from Rock Ranch receives advice from judge Will Covert; photo by Kristina Behringer. Laura Benson (center) and Caeli Cavanagh coach rider Olivia Rasmussen on Sylgja frá Ketilsstöðum in dressage; photo by Charlotte Reilly. Laura Benson teaches Shay Harvey on Fleygur from Destiny Farm; photo by Eleanor Anderson. Zoe Johnson, winner of the Featherlight Award, shows Þór frá Litlu-Sandvík 1 in loose-rein tölt; photo by Kristina Behringer. Team Blue, the Waveriders (Kajsa Johnson, Jay Maio, Payton Black, Robyn Schmutz, and Mary Hedrick), practice their drill team routine; photo by Charlotte Reilly. Ayla Green coaches Alicia Flanigan on Brynjar from Dalalif; photo by Charlotte Reilly. The AYC 2017 logo, designed by Laura Benson, with help from Juan Sebastian Montoya.

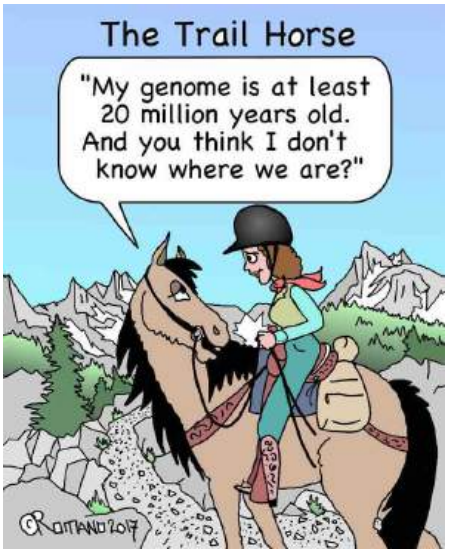














COMPETITION SEASON

The Icelandic horse competition season is in full swing, and a total of 87 World Ranking events have been registered with FEIF internationally this year. Good news for us here in the U.S.: Léttleiki Icelandics in Shelbyville, KY will be hosting three world ranking events on October 6-8.

2017 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

The 2017 FEIF World Championships were held August 7-13 in Oirschot, the Netherlands. Look for a report in the next issue of the *Quarterly*.

2019 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

The contract between FEIF and Islandpferdezentrum Berlin (IZB) for the 2019 World Championships was signed in Haarlem, NL. This concluded an unusual process of a double invitation to organize the Championships. In the end, the only application FEIF received from either invitation was from Berlin.

IZB has assured FEIF that a new practice/warm-up track will be built on the same grounds as the competition track and the connection will be made out of the same material as the track. IZB informed FEIF that the grounds have been reallocated by the City of Berlin, so that they are now owned by two different entities. One of the new owners will be replacing the fixed stable buildings with new stables with attached indoor riding spaces. This work is planned to be completed in 2018. The new buildings will be available for IZB's use. Furthermore, an agreement is in place to move the resident trotting horses completely away to make more space available for the Icelandic horses during the World Championships 2019.

ICETEST

After the 2011 FEIF Software Conference, a committee started working on defining the requirements for the next generation of Icelandic horse sport competition software: IceTest NG. The first steps toward creating the new software, based upon the requirements and functionality defined so far, have been taken. People interested in joining the project are invited to contact Doug Smith (doug@feif.org).

GÆÐINGAKEPPNI

Last year saw a reversal in the cooperation between Landssamband Hestamannafélaga (the Icelandic Equestrian Association) and FEIF regarding the handling of gæðingakeppni competitions outside of Iceland. The information made available to the member countries via FEIF is not accurate, and attempts to address the problems have been largely unsuccessful. The FEIF Sport Department recommends taking a hard look at how gæðingakeppni competitions are handled outside of Iceland. Since Landssamband Hestamannafélaga has exclusive control over the rules and licensing of gæðingakeppni judges, FEIF should step back and refer all gæðingakeppni matters to Landssamband Hestamannafélaga directly.

WORLD RANKING 2016 SEASON

2016 marked a return to a more normal number of World Ranking tournaments, as compared to the record-setting 2015 season. The total number of tournaments (82) is slightly lower than the normal trend, but does not cause concern. There is a pattern of fewer World Ranking events in non-World Championship years. Comparing the 2016 season to the most recent non-championship year, 2014, the statistics remain very steady. The only notable exception is Sweden, which held six World Ranking events in 2016, as compared to eleven in 2014. Notably, Sweden was the only country last year to hold fewer events than in 2014.

The other statistics tracked by FEIF (number of riders per country and test, number of horses, number of marks processed, etc.) are all similar to the 2014 levels, when adjusted for the slight decrease in the number of events.

There has been some progress in controlling deviations from the published Rules and Regulations. We continue to see countries being inventive when it comes to finding ways to get around the rule limiting the number of eligible tests for a starting combination on a single tournament. This

is mainly to find constructs to manage the number of starters in Sport A via qualification systems and allowing Sport A qualification to be achieved at the same time as it is ridden.

The FEIF Sport and Sport Judges Committee failed to implement a reporting system for World Ranking events as planned. However, FEIF did manage to identify a "responsible" judge (a FEIF International Sport Judge who was active on the tournament and could serve as a point of contact between the FEIF Office, Director of Sport, and the competition) for each World Ranking tournament, which proved to be a helpful tool in tracking down irregularities in the reporting of results. We will try again in the 2017 season to establish a workable reporting system.

GOOD & HARMONIOUS RIDING

The Good and Harmonious Riding program remains quite strong: 2016 saw even more recommendations of riders for the "GHR" status than 2015, even with the decrease in the number of tournaments. Highlights from the 2016 season include: A total of 109 riders were nominated as Good and Harmonious riders; 21 of the riders were also nominated in one of the four previous years; 22 of the riders were also nominated in two of the four previous years; 11 of the riders were nominated in three of the past four years; 3 riders have the distinction of being nominated in all four previous years. For 2016, Kristian Tofte Ambo and Josefin Birkebro share the honor of being the most nominated riders. Kristian was nominated by 10 judges across four events; Josefin was nominated by 13 judges across three events.

In 2017, 55 riders have been nominated as of June 22. FEIF proudly lists the names of the nominees on every page of the FEIF website.

RIDING HORSE PROFILE

FEIF has developed a new Riding Horse Profile, which is intended to create the best possible match between rider and horse. The Riding Horse profile is a snapshot of both the character and behavior of the horse, as well as of the needs and abilities of the rider. It is factual, neutral, and involves a professional trainer or a trusted horse person, who understands the needs of the rider. The Rider Form and Trainer Form can be downloaded from the FEIF website. See the articles in this issue of the *Quarterly*.



FEIF YOUTH CAMP

The biannual FEIF Youth Camp was held in Sint Truiden, Belgium on July 11-18. The 20 participants, representing seven FEIF nations, enjoyed visits to Antwerp, a draft horse stud farm (located in a castle), and a theme park; lectures and demonstrations on equine dentistry and long-reining; and practice riding and driving Icelandic horses. According to the FEIF Youth coordinator, "It was an amazing week of trying out the familiar and encountering new things: a new culture, new food (Belgium is obsessed with chocolate, so it is win-win), and other horse breeds, including the huge draft horses from the beer production of olden days (another thing Belgium has to offer). But most importantly, it was a week of discovery and forming trans-European bonds of friendship and mutual understanding, even if we do things differently at home."

The FEIF Youth Camp is an international camp for young people ages 13 to 17. The goal of the camp is to bring together young people from different countries. All should share a passion for the Icelandic horse, and the participants will also learn something of the horse culture(s) of the host nation. In order to take part in the FEIF Youth Camp, riders do not have to own (or bring) a horse, but they should be interested in Icelandics and have some riding experience. Contact the USIHC Youth leader, Kelly Blough, at youth@icelandics.org for information on the next FEIF Youth Camp in 2019.

BREEDING HORSE TRAINER SEMINAR

The seventh FEIF seminar for breeding horse trainers took place at Skeiðvellir, Iceland. Participating were 22 talented riders from Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden. The seminar included sessions on the theory behind FEIF breeding evaluations, training and management for showing breeding horses, presenting the horse in hand, riding and testing different horses with video analysis, and discussions with well-known breeding horse riders and judges.

Thanks to the organizers and the great team of trainers, breeding judges, lecturers, and riders who contributed their time and expertise: Davíð Jónsson, Elsa Albertsdóttir, Inge Kringeland, Jóhann Ragnarsson, Katrín Sigurðardóttir, Ólafur Andri Guðmundsson, Olil Amble, and Sigurður Sæmundsson.

If you are interested in participating in a future seminar, inform your national breeding leader and check the FEIF website for the invitation to the next one.

DID YOU KNOW?

On the FEIF website you can access a word list of Icelandic horse related words and terms translated into six languages: Icelandic, English, Danish, Dutch, German, and Swedish. Want to know what "flugskeið" is in English or German? Just type the word and its translation appears in all six languages.

AFFILIATED CLUB UPDATES

There are 14 Regional Clubs and one Activity Club affiliated with the U.S. Icelandic Horse Congress. To find the one nearest you, see the USIHC website at www.icelandics.org/regional-clubs. Contact information for each club can also be found there. The following clubs filed updates on their activities this quarter.

CIA (CALIFORNIA)

The CIA Open Spring Show, held April 29-30 at Flying C Ranch in Santa Ynez, CA, was the first Icelandic horse show of the 2017 season. Twenty-two horse-and-rider combinations competed before judge Valdimar Auðunsson. Scores are posted on the USIHC website at www.icelandics.org/showresults. More photos by Isaac Dwyer of Moon Rock Photo can be seen at www.moonrockphoto.com/Flying-C-2017. The CIA Open Fall Show will be held in October. Watch the USIHC events calendar for information.











Scenes from the CIA Open Spring Show at Flying C Ranch in Santa Ynez, CA: Annie Aston and Gerpir II from Fitjamyri (top left); Eden Hendricks and Lilja from Shaggy Mountain (top right); Ayla Green on Mári frá Kolgerði (bottom left), Laurie Prestine on Straumur frá Enni (center) and Olivia Rasmussen and Sylgja frá Ketilsstöðum (bottom right). Photos by Isaac Dwyer.

FLUGNIR (MINNESOTA & WISCONSIN)

BY JACKIE ALSCHULER AND EVE AND DAVE LOFTNESS

We held our second annual Winter Warm-up Party on January 21, joining together for games, conversation, and a drawing for prizes. We also encouraged members to step up and "be the change" they would like to see in the club. Our goal was to generate new ideas and plans to carry them out. A list was compiled and we now have many ideas in progress.

In late April Flugnir members participated in the 35th Annual Minnesota Horse Expo at the state fairgrounds. Two drill team demos were performed in the very large Lee & Rose Warner Coliseum. This year's breed demo included gait demonstrations with riders bedecked in Icelandic soccer team jerseys and tossing tiny Flugnir soccer squeeze balls into the crowd. There were also two special demos held in the Agstar Arena showcasing Icelandic horse "speed" drills. Riding in the demos were Coralie Denmeade of Tamangur Icelandic Horses, Jen Hovde, Sydney Horas of OnIce Horse Farm, Sharon Johnson, Dave Loftness, Sue Schloner, Kydee Sheetz of Aslan's Country Icelandics, and Laurelyn Turbes. Jackie Alschuler, Karen Ashton, Eve Loftness, Jerry Oliver, and Susy Oliver rode in the daily Parade of Breeds.



Alex Dannenmann gave a clinic for Flugnir members at Winterhorse Park in Eagle, WI in May. Here she works with Roger Haab and Piltur from Winterhorse. Photo by Robin Guernsey.

Eve and Dave Loftness designed and organized an arena obstacle challenge "Battle of the Breeds" this year at the request of the Minnesota Horse Expo board. It was held on Friday and Saturday, with emcee assistance from Raven Flores; riders were judged on both their horsemanship and the cooperation of their horses. Representing the Icelandic breed in the novice division was Jen Hovde riding Kydee's stallion Alfadans, and in the open division Kydee rode her mare Rispa. Both riders placed second in their divisions! The event was successful enough that it will likely be continued in future years.



Flugnir Club members and friends taking part in the Parade of Breeds at the Minnesota Horse Expo wore Icelandic soccer jerseys. Riders were: Sue Schloner, Sydney Horas, Laurelyn Turbes, Sharon Johnson, Jen Hovde, Jackie Alschuler, Dave Loftness, Karen Ashton, Coralie Denmeade, and Susy Oliver. Photo by Deb Cook.

We have been fortunate to have a number of clinics to choose from this year, including two by Barbara Frische at Aslan's Country Icelandics in Proctor, MN and one at Tölthaven Ranch in Pelican Rapids, MN. Winterhorse Park in Eagle, WI organized a clinic by Alexandra Dannenmann of Florida Icehorse Farm and several by Steinar Sigurbjörnsson presenting Intrinzen. Steinar also taught at River Brink Farms in River Falls, WI, while Marlise Grimm came to Tölthaven Ranch later in the summer.

We were proud to sponsor Flugnir member Jay Maio, grandson of Dan and Barb Riva of Winterhorse Park, as he was accepted to the Icelandic Horse American Youth Cup in Santa Cruz, CA in July. This is the second time Jay has participated in the AYC.

The annual Flugnirkeppni competition was scheduled for August 26-27 at Winterhorse Park in Eagle, WI. The judge is Silke Feuchthofen, a FEIF International Sport and Breeding judge from Germany. For more information on Flugnir activities, please visit our website at www.flugnir.org.



The Flugnir Drill Team performed at the Minnesota Horse Expo in April. Left to right, they are Laurelyn Turbes on Kappi from Little Bit Farm, Karen Aston on Kormákur frá Lagsstöðum, Sydney Horas on Vordís from Moondance Acres, Jackie Alschuler on Léo frá Stennesi, Dave Loftness on Demantur from Nordurstjarna, Susy Oliver on Keli from Tolthaven, Coralie Denmeade on Var frá Grafarkoti, Sharon Johnson on Rauðskinni frá Grafarkoti, Jen Hovde on Tandri from Aslans Country, and Sue Schloner on Rispa from Aslans Country. Photo by Liz Stimmler.

GLITFAXA (CALIFORNIA)

BY GABRIELE MEYER

Glitfaxa Icelandic Horse Club of the Greater Bay Area (GIHC) came to life in spring of 2017. Our members live in the counties north and east of San Francisco, as well as in Napa/Sonoma, Sacramento, and the Foothills. Some of us originally were (and still are) members of Kraftur, our sister club, which covers mostly the areas south of San Francisco. During recent years, however, traffic conditions in the Bay Area have gone from bad to worse, which put a serious damper on our enthusiasm here in the north to partake in the events in the south. We started our new club with nine members and have grown to 15 within the first three months.



Glitfaxa members out on the trail in California (left to right): Mark Homer on Gazella from Gaited Acres, Lisa Herbert on Bangsi, Nancy Freeman on Vinur from Gaited Acres, Pia Tucker on Prins frá Feti, Julie Ryan on Saegola from Zayante Creek. Photo by Gabriele Meyer.



No, that's not an optical illusion: A gigantic redwood tree had fallen during the winter, blocking the trail. A slice was cut out of the trunk to re-open it. Photo by Gabriele Meyer.

Our first club ride took place on June 18 at Point Reyes National Park. During the weeks before the ride, we experienced quite cool temperatures, so nobody anticipated that the weather would change so profoundly. A heat wave developed over the West, with record-breaking temperatures. We would either have to cancel our first ride or brave temperatures surpassing 100ºF. (Measured temperature at Point Reyes that day was 107ºF.) Our ingenious trail organizer, Lisa Herbert, decided to go ahead with the ride, and chose a route with less elevation gain and plenty of shade. For those of us concerned about the trailer ride home, she offered beds and paddocks for the night, so that trailering could be done in the cooler hours of Monday morning!

The new route led us through coastal live oaks on a gently sloping downhill trail into a wide grassy valley, which served as a pasture for cattle and had a huge stone water trough with clean water. After traversing the valley, we ascended into the forest and passed a few ponds completely overgrown with cattails. We even rode through an area with redwood trees. This trail is called "Rift Zone Trail," because it follows the San Andreas Fault (the main fault line separating the Pacific and North American continental plates).

This trail is an in-and-out, with the



The Glitfaxa horses enjoying the watering hole (clockwise from top left): Prins, Bangsi, Gazella, Saegola, Askur, and Vinur. Photo by Gabriele Meyer.

turning point at Stewart's Horse Camp. Early in the morning before the ride, Lisa drove to the horse camp to hide an ice chest. While the horses nibbled on grass, we riders enjoyed bread, cheeses, water, and champagne! We finally had the opportunity to get to know each other, as most of us had not met before. While we hung out there, a welcome breeze picked up. So we rode back refreshed and elated by the beauty of the landscape, our wonderful horses, and the new (and renewed) friendships.

This trail ride can be viewed as an appetizer for the horse camping trip we plan for August, where we will stay for a couple of nights at Stewart's Horse Camp. Then in September, we will switch gears and have a clinic with Centered Riding instructor Carla Bauchmueller.

HESTAFOLK (NORTHWEST WASHINGTON)

BY LISA MCKEEN
AND KATHRYN LOCKERBIE

Hestafolk folk have been super busy, just like we like it! We started the year with a clinic with Freya Sturm at the end of March. In April, our Fire Mountain trip was canceled due to the weather. We will re-visit that trip later this summer or fall.

At the end of April, several members attended a Guðmar Pétursson clinic at Red Feather Farm in Trout Lake, WA. We continue to be impressed with Guðmar's teaching and riding abilities. All went away with clear goals to work towards.

May was wet again, so our first weekend events were postponed. We did have members participate in the Back Country Horsemen of Whatcom County Confidence Builder. This is an event where BCH sets up obstacles like creek crossings, bridges, trailers, flapping tarps, etc., and provides support for riders to get their horses safe and trail savvy. Colette Cloutier took Dís frá Krossi to participate, and member Nancy Giordano helped with the event. It is such a supportive environment and really shows off our horses at their best.

Three of us went to Vernon, BC and attended the Sports Judging Seminar at Fitjamyri Icelandic Farm. We worked with Pétur Jökull Hákonarson, Kathryn Lockerbie, and Mariah Badyk to earn our interim judge certifications. We learned lots and loved the hospitality provided by Toos and Arnold Faber. Should you have an opportunity to visit Fitjamyri, do it! What a beautiful place with wonderful people to visit.

For the third year in a row, Hestafolk had an entry in the Ski to Sea Blossom Time Parade. We dress up like Shield Maidens, and our horses are always popular with the crowds, handling the parade with grace—and it doesn't hurt that we bring our own cheering section as well. This year Nancy Giordano drove her wagonette with Emma pulling. We had new club member Monica Urrutia ride, and she brought her family to support us by riding in the parade and helping with the poop scooping. It was a beautiful day and so much fun to have



Hestafolk member Lisa McKeen is interviewed by local TV at the Ski to Sea Parade. Photo by Van Herndon.



For their parade costumes, Hestafolk members dressed as "shield maidens." Here, Willa Herndon-Schepper rides Elska from Extreme Farms. Photo by Van Herndon.

more folks involved this year. We are especially excited to see the youth becoming involved in the activities of the club.

Our next clinic with Freya Sturm was held the first weekend of June, and we tried a new way of offering it. People could choose to have as many (or few) lessons as they wanted. As a result, we had 26 lessons over the 3 days that Freya was in Bellingham, loaning horses to people who couldn't trailer theirs. Lessons on the trail were wonderful for developing the rider's skill—and the horse's as well. It was great to be on the trail, outside in lovely weather, and have our coach there to give us suggestions about how to help our horses use their bodies better. We can't wait to do this again. Several members are interested in a week-long horse camp where we can learn about equestrian mounted games.

A June 10 ride was hosted by club members Lois and Fred Alms, who own property at Cowboy Camp in Sedro Wooley. This RV- and horse-friendly property is connected to miles and miles of trails. Club members enjoyed the woods and good company. On June 19, Linda Wallitner organized a ride at the Pilchuck Tree Farm, a place with 5,000 acres and trails to ride. We were so excited to check it out and have already scheduled another ride later in the summer. And at the end of June, our club is taking a trip to Mountain Icelandic Ranch (MIR) in Leavenworth. Patti Erikson is hosting, and we are so excited to ride trails up the Icicle Creek and around the area.

Club members are also going to events outside the club schedule, and we can't wait to hear what they saw and learned. For example, on June 23-24 Red Feather hosted a clinic and Young Horse Evaluation with Arnar Bjarki Sigurðarson. There was also a full evaluation at Fitjamyri in Vernon, BC that several members attended.

KLETTAFJALLA (ROCKY MOUNTAINS)

BY BETTY MARTIN, LEE ANN OTT, AND KRISTINA BEHRINGER

On May 27, Andrea Brodie, DVM and owner of Lough Arrow II Icelandics, conducted a breeding seminar for the Klettafjalla Club on her beautiful 160-acre ranch in southern Colorado. Writes Betty Martin, "This was an exceptional study detailing the characteristics, traits, conformation, gaits, and potential faults in breeding the Icelandic horse. Andrea's insight is invaluable. She explained the pros and cons of in-line breeding, cross-line breeding, and hybrid breeding. Furthermore, Andrea is very knowledgeable of the practices in Iceland, beginning hundreds of years ago through selective breeding and active culling to produce exceptional horses specific to the breeding goals of a particular farm.



In Colorado, veterinarian Andrea Brodie gave a breeding seminar for the Klettafjalla Club, focusing on famous breeding lines. Shown are Drífa from Lough Arrow and her foal Flúð. Drífa is a 75% Svaðastaðir line-bred mare with Hornafjörður and old Stokkhólmur line blood. Photo by Andrea Brodie.



In Utah, Coralie Denmeade (right) works with Lee Ann Ott on Vaengur from Ironhorse. Photo by Stephen Pace.

"The intriguing aspect of this seminar was learning about the traits and characteristics your particular horse inherited in relation to their lineage. Simply stated, your horse is the way it is due to the breeding goals adapted decades ago by one of a handful of breeders in Iceland. Some horses were bred for size and strength, some for lightness and fine limbs, others for intelligence, and typically all for clear beat, four or five gaits and willingness. Andrea then reviewed our horses's pedigrees and provided details about the specific lineage of each. Truly an insight into your horse's personality. If you have the opportunity to attend Andrea's seminars in the future, do so!"

Coralie Denmeade gave a clinic in Utah on April 18-19. Writes Lee Ann Ott, "We were so excited to have Coralie back again for another spring clinic. We held our clinic at the Oakley Indoor Arena: In the spring the weather can be very unpredictable, so indoor is best. Barbara Ohm, Stephen Pace, Marisue Wells, and I had two wonderful days. With such a small group,



Ulla Hudson gave a clinic for Klettafjalla Club members in Colorado. Here, Ulla works with Leia Tilton on Skjoni, while Maile Behringer watches. Photo by Iris Heidberg.

we had individual lessons and were able to pick up where we left off last year. All of us had improved our seat and legs. Each of us worked on our own program of improvement with our horses. We are looking good!

"We would like to mention that this clinic was supported by the USIHC and we would all like to thank the Congress for their support. It's very hard for some of us to participate, when there are so few riders. We did advertise with fliers at the local feed stores and other arenas, with no success. Each of us called on other regional club members in our area with a personal invitation, also with no results. We will keep trying! We just want to mention to others in our club that we will travel to any sanctioned show in the Klettafjalla region in the near future. There have been rumors."

In Brighton, CO, Renee and Mike Adams hosted a clinic taught by Ulla Hudson, owner of Windsong Icelandics. Writes Kristina Behringer, "The clinic focused on how the rider can train or correct their horse to have clean and clear beat and well-separated gaits, as well as ways to help the horse to use the hind end for better impulsion, collection, and, well, better everything. Ulla is an extremely qualified instructor in both dressage and Icelandic horse training. She has both the USDF Gold Medal and German Gold Medal in dressage, and is also an FEI-qualified rider and instructor. Riders and auditors appreciated her hands-on teaching style, terrific sense of humor, and the casual environment that allowed for questions and on-the-spot discussions. A very fun, yet educational, time was had by all. We appreciate the USIHC for their financial assistance and we are looking forward to inviting Ulla back again soon."

NEIHC (NORTHEAST)

BY JESS HAYNSWORTH

The spring quarter kicked off with a Judging Seminar at Thor Icelandics in Claverack, NY from April 20-23. The event, which was organized by Leslie Chambers and Alex Dannenman and taught by Þorgeir Guðlaugsson, was an exciting opportunity for Americans to take the seminar and test to become certified as C or B level judges. Historically in the U.S., these seminars have been held alongside a sport competition so that the attendees can practice judging a live competition. Such an arrangement offers a great range of horses and classes for the students to judge, but the downside is that it puts competition riders in the position of choosing between riding in the competition or taking the seminar. The seminar this spring was held apart from any official sport competition; this meant that competition riders (including myself!) were able to attend. Leslie organized a schooling show and pre-show clinic with Alex Dannenman so that those of us taking the judging seminar had access to live horses to judge. Seven students participated in the clinic with Alex, which received USIHC Policy 31 funding, for which we are very grateful. Nine horse/rider pairs participated in the schooling show. Because of the laid-back nature of the show, those of us taking the judging seminar were also able to practice running equipment checks, which was a fascinating experience. Þorgeir was an excellent instructor and



Three NEIHC youth members received grants of $250 each from the NEIHC Youth Fund to attend the 2017 American Youth Cup in Santa Cruz, CA: left to right, Alicia Flanigan from Maine, Gray Strausser from Pennsylvania, and Isabelle Maranda from Vermont. Photo by Julia Hasenauer.



Alexandra Dannenmann (center) judged a schooling show at Solheimar Farm in Vermont. Flanking her are two of the winners, NEIHC youth members Kamilla and Tristan Brickner. Photo by Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir.

presented the information clearly, taking the time to answer all our questions. Of the 12 students who took the judging seminar, six chose to take the test, and two, Jana Meyer and Freija Thye, passed both sections of the test to become B level judges. This is particularly exciting news for the Northeast, because Jana resides in Vermont. She has already judged one schooling show in the Northeast since completing her testing. Congratulations, Jana and Freija, and thank you to Leslie, Alex, and Þorgeir for a fun and successful seminar!

Several clinics and schooling shows took place in the Northeast this spring. Guðmar Pétursson taught at Echo Ledge Farm in Vermont from May 19-21. Carrie Lyons Brandt taught at Thor Icelandics from May 27-29. From June 2-4, a clinic with Alex Pregitzer was held in Connecticut. About this clinic, Leslie Chambers writes: "The NEIHC invited Alex to hold a clinic specifically targeting our pleasure riders. Clinics associated with competitions can feel too intimidating for some riders (although we always welcome all members to participate to improve their riding skills, no matter their specific goals, competition or pleasure riding). Thanks to NEIHC member Catherine Slattery, who offered her Spring Hills Farm in Granby CT, and with financial assistance from the USIHC policy #31 funding, the NEIHC held the Improving Tolt in Your Trail Horse clinic. Six members participated in the clinic, which gave all riders a total of four lessons over a two-day period. Lessons were held in Catherine's brand new outdoor riding ring and on the beautiful trails adjacent to her farm. We were also able to have a group trail ride on the last day. Alex is a wonderful clinician who listens to each person's concerns and goals and then adapts her lessons to help meet those goals. A good time was had by all and we thank both Alex and Catherine for making it happen."

From May 9-12, Caeli Cavanagh taught a clinic at Echo Ledge Farm in Woodstock, VT. Writes Caeli: "The clinic, called Transition from Riding to Training the Icelandic Horse, was my capstone project for my second year at Hólar University in Iceland. It covered training fundamentals and included consultations on training plans for both horse and rider, as well as touching on jumping, seat exercises, and liberty work. The six horse-and-rider participants all progressed very well through the four-day clinic, and we all had fun learning together. A special thank-you to trainer and Hólar graduate Carrie Brandt of Taktur Icelandics, who supervised the clinic in accordance with the requirements of Hólar." This fall, Caeli will begin her third and final year at the university, and will soon be the third American (after Laura Benson and Carrie) to graduate from Hólar.



Clinician Alex Pregitzer (left) rides with Nancy Wines-Dewan during the NEIHC's "Improving Tölt in Your Trail Horse" clinic, held at Spring Hills Farm in Granby, CT. Photo by Leslie Chambers.



NEIHC member Jana Meyer (center) receives instruction from Þorgeir Guðlaugsson (at right) during the Judging Seminar at Thor Icelandics in Claverack, NY. Jana was certified as a B level sport judge. Photo by Martina Gates.

This spring, Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir held two schooling shows at her Solheimar Farm in Tunbridge, VT. The one on May 13-14 was judged by Alex Dannenman, and the one on June 3 by Jana Meyer. Both were great preparation for the "mane event" in the Northeast every year, the NEIHC Open sanctioned show, which was held on June 24-25 at Thor Icelandics in Claverack, NY. There was also a pre-show clinic with Carrie Brandt from June 21-23. See the story in this issue.

The summer season is now in full swing, and we have a lot to look forward to in our region. On July 8, a Youth Games Day will be held at Mad River Valley Icelandics in Vermont, with special mounted games competitions for children. On July 29, Solheimar Farm in Vermont will be hosting a schooling show. On August 26, Mad River Valley Icelandics will host a second Games Day.

On September 16-17, a Breeding Show Seminar and Clinic will be held at the Cobleskill Fairgrounds in New York. About this event, Martina Gates writes the following: "Would you like to know if it makes sense to show your horse in a breeding show, see what the scores could be, or just know more about what it is all about and what could be expected? Interested in riding your own horse in a breeding show? Herdís Reynisdóttir, an international breeding judge for 15 years and a well known and experienced rider who has shown horses at Landsmót and internationally, will explain all about the FEIF system, what the judges look at and why, as well as how to best present the horses, both for conformation and in the ridden test. Horses will be unofficially scored and riders/owners will be given a chance to have their horses judged on an official track by an international FEIF breeding judge. This clinic was developed by Herdís and held in Germany, in partnership with veteran professional breeding show and competition riders, with great success and acclaim."

Finally, on September 23-24 Solheimar Farm will host a two-day show. We look forward to a fun and busy summer season. Happy trails, and enjoy the warm weather while it lasts!

NWIHC (EASTERN SLOPE CASCADES)

BY DEBBY DILLARD

The NWIHC held their annual meeting in May at Greg and Debby Dillard's Makani Farms in Ellensburg, WA. It was a beautiful day and we were able to hold the meeting outside, taking in the view while planning, learning, laughing, and sharing stories of the wonderful Icelandic horse. There is nothing better than a gathering of fellow Icelandic horse owners, breeders, and enthusiasts. Elections were held and the new officers are: president, Debby Dillard; vice president, Linda Templeton; secretary, Lori Birge; and treasurer, Greg Dillard. Staying true to the club's mission of bringing more education to our horses and their people, we are looking forward to hosting a two-day clinic with Mandy Pretty at the end of September at Makani Farms. Mandy is a well-known and respected instructor, trainer, and clinician from The Icelandic Horse Farm in Vernon, BC. She will be offering her philosophies of the Tellington TTouch Method and Connected Riding, backed by years of training, experience, and life on a large Icelandic horse farm. While her focus will be on improving horse and rider communication, performance, and confidence in a quiet, effective, and respectful manner, she will also offer overall education on the Icelandic horse. Mandy will provide information on how to recognize correct biomechanics and how to identify postural tendencies and bracing patterns in both horse and rider. She will teach how to identify and influence the tölt, recognize conformation, and understand Icelandic breed tendencies. The NWIHC is looking forward to welcoming horses and riders from across the Pacific Northwest to this fun and educational event.

TOPPUR (IOWA)

BY VIRGINIA LAURIDSEN

Members of the Toppur Icelandic Horse Club gathered at Harmony Icelandics in Truro, IA on April 21-23 for their first clinic, From Ground to Saddle, with rider and trainer Guðmundur "Mummi" Skúlason. Mummi traveled from Iceland to offer instruction on transfering ground exercises into riding skills. Mother Nature smiled upon us with clear skies and warm temperatures.



Trainer Guðmundur (Mummi) Skúlason from Hallkellsstaðahlíð visited the Toppur Club. Photo by Luke Shryver.

Mummi started us in small groups to work on exercises from the ground. "If you



Toppur Club members Steffi Shryver on Gosi frá Lambastöðum (left) and Liz Appel on Gnýr frá Morastöðum practice a balance exercise during their "From Ground to Saddle" clinic in Iowa. Photo by Luke Shryver.

can't communicate it on the ground, you won't have much luck in the saddle!" he said. We worked on body position, bending, moving the hind and front quarters, changing speeds, dropping the head and bending at the poll, "kissing" the stirrups, proper rein tension, and instilling mutual respect and a calm attitude.

When all horses and riders felt relaxed and confident, we moved on to balancing exercises in the saddle. Mummi showed us how much our body position affects the movement of our horses. Everyone quickly became aware of their own tension! We worked on balance, shoulder and hip position, looking "ahead," keeping our hands stable and even, and sitting deeply in the saddle. We learned to change speed and halt our horses by using our body position and not relying on the reins. Mummi demonstrated how to steer by changing the weight in your seat bones. We worked on a "snake line" and used the dressage whip to help us keep steady hands. All of us were amazed at the response we could get from the smallest of cues, and our horses were much happier with the newfound lighter touch.

Finally, we applied our new techniques to riding at trot and tölt. After a break for lunch and some light-hearted fun, we each had a private lesson with Mummi. He was able to identify specific issues for each horse and rider combination and to show how the ground work we learned can be applied to solve problems and improve balance.

Sunday morning brought more private lessons and demonstrations. We all benefited from watching each other and learning how to work on individual problems. We ended the clinic with small group tölt classes and games on horseback. It was wonderful to spend the weekend improving our riding skills and socializing with members of our young club. We are still small, but have grown by 20% in three months!

For Memorial Day weekend, Daniela West, Kirby Antisdel, and I hauled three horses to Duluth, MN to participate in the Flugnir club's clinic with Barbara Frische. We had a blast! Kydee Sheetz was a wonderful hostess, and Barbara was terrific. She was able to help us understand how our horses' conformation affected their movement. With that in mind, she gave us insightful instruction on how we can best work with our individual problems. We really enjoyed spending time with our fellow Icelandic fans in Flugnir. Since we are a new club, we were doubly appreciative of their support and camaraderie. We hope to see our new friends at future clinics and shows.







Scenes from Toppur's "From Ground to Saddle" clinic with Mummi Skúlason: At top, Steffi Shryver on Gosi frá Lambastöðum (left) and Liz Appel on Gnýr frá Morastöðum practice a passing exercise. Below, Daniela West on Riddari from Bonaventure Farm, Kirby Antisdel on Vörður frá Hallkellsstaðahlíð, and Dave Ferguson on Lyfting frá Hallkellsstaðahlíð work on a snake line. In the middle are Virginia Lauridsen and Vörður. Photos by Luke Shryver.

ON WITH THE SHOW!

BY JESSICA HAYNSWORTH

On June 24-25, the Northeast Icelandic Horse Club held its fifth annual NEIHC Open Show at Thor Icelandics in Claverack, NY. We enjoyed our best turnout ever, with 153 entries and 51 horse/rider combinations. Although there were thunderstorm warnings, the weather held up for a beautiful competition weekend.

Youth participation was excellent, as we added two new kids' classes, Freestyle and Mix-in-a-Bag, along with our existing Pleasure Tölt Junior and Three Gait Junior, to create four classes suitable for children age eight and under. These classes are part of a new movement within our club to create a sensible progression of classes for children leading up to the FEIF Youth Classes, which are relatively demanding for younger beginner riders. Pleasure Tölt Junior and Three Gait Junior are "trainer assisted" classes, in which trainers are allowed to speak to their students or even jog along with them on the track if the kids are particularly young. Kids are judged on how well they are able to separate and maintain their horses' gaits, but are not given a traditional score as the gait quality is not what's being judged. Freestyle and Mix-in-a-Bag are also trainer assisted classes, but these classes are not judged at all, and are simply intended to give young riders the opportunity to have a positive experience riding on a track in front of an audience. It was great fun to watch the little ones flying around the track together on their excellent horses.



Beth Timlege riding Freyr frá Þingeyrum in T7 Novice Tölt. Photo by Jean Ervasti.



Five-year-old Finja Meyer-Hoyt canters her horse, Goði frá Neðri-Svertingsstöðum, in the Youth Four Gait (11-and-under) class. Photo by Heleen Heyning.

Other highlights included the Open classes, which are always so exciting to watch. Terral Hill and Veigar frá Lækjamóti won the T1 final and the special trophy donated by Thor Icelandics in honor of Einar Oder Magnússon. The V1 winner was Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir and Parker frá Solheimum. Terral won the F1 final on Svarta Nott from Dalalif, and Gabrielle Pittman got the crowd going when she won the Speedpass aboard Glæða frá Storu-Ásgeirsá.

Our most popular class was Team Fourgait, in which teams of two horse/

rider pairs ride together and each choose two gaits to show, finishing on the team's combined score at the end. The winners of this class were a youth team, Michael Kooyman on Hreyfing frá Minni-Borg and eight-year-old Harriet Shipman on Víkingur from Thor Icelandics.

The Pairs in Harmony class was also very popular; it was won by Leslie Chambers on Thokki from Four Winds Farm and Thorunn Kristjánsdóttir aboard Soldís from Mill Farm. The pair was especially fun to watch, because their roan horses are mother and son. The riders dressed up with red lipstick and scarves around their necks in the typical style of NEIHC member Andrea Hanson, who owns Soldís and who was recovering from surgery at the time. The ride was dedicated to Andrea and live-streamed via FaceTime so that Andrea could watch. We wish you a speedy recovery, Andrea!

This was also the first show in the Northeast in which horses were shown under the new experimental FEIF alternative shoeing rule, which allows for composite shoes and hoof boots, as opposed to only traditional metal shoes. The rule change



Kamilla Brickner and Vangskjona from Green Mountain competing in the 8-and-under Freestyle class. (Since this was not a FIPO class, the judges approved of the use of a halter and safety strap with the bridle.) Photo by Jean Ervasti.



Judges Alex Dannenmann (far left) and Alex Pregitzer (far right) are joined by show organizers (left to right) Susan Peters, Susan Moore, Amy Goddard, Emily Potts, and Cindy Westcott. Photo by Jean Ervasti.

was proposed in response to new research that suggests that composite shoes and hoof boots may reduce concussion on horses' joints, therefore putting less strain on the horses' bodies than traditional metal shoes. Vigri frá Vallanesi and Spönn frá Efri-Rauðalæk competed in Duplo composite shoes, with Vigri finishing third in both T1 and V1 with Jess Haynsworth, and Spönn finishing second in Speedpass, also with Jess. Both horses underwent tack and shoeing checks, as required by FEIF during this experimental period, and we are happy to report that the shoes caused no issues and both horses had clean performances and clean tack/shoeing checks. Spönn also competed in the four children's fun classes with seven-year-old rider Liesl Kolbe.

As in past years, we awarded division championships to the horse/rider pairs with the highest combined scores in their division's tölt and multi-gait classes. Terral Hill and Veigar frá Lækjamóti were the Open Level Champions, with Sophie Zurstrassen taking the Reserve Championship on Hrönn frá Hófgerði. Mike Kooyman and Hreyfing frá Minni-Borg won the Intermediate Division Championship, with Leslie Chambers and Vaskur from Four Winds taking the Reserve. Brigit Huwyler and Prinsessa from Four Winds were the Novice Level Champions, with Claudia Burnham on Hrund vom Pfaffenbuck II taking the Reserve Championship. Julia Livingston and Gréta from Creekside Farm were the Youth (12-and-up) Champions, and Amelie Maranda on Frami from Mill Farm were the Youth (11-and-under) Champions. Finally, in the most popular division at the show, the Green Horse Division Champions were Beth Timlege and Freyr frá Þingeyrum, with Sue Sundstrom and Loftstein frá Ragnheiðarstöðum taking the Reserve.

Thank you to everyone who attended the NEIHC Open, and to those who sponsored classes, donated to the Silent Auction, and/or volunteered their time. Leslie Chambers offers a special thank



Seven-year-old Liesl Kolbe on Spönn frá Efri-Rauðalæk being led by her trainer, Jessica Haynsworth. Spönn, shod in Duple composite shoes, is one of the first horses to compete under the new experimental FEIF rule allowing for alternative shoeing options. Photo by Jean Ervasti.



Richard Davis canters Frosti frá Akureyri in the Five Gait Open. Photo by Jean Ervasti.



Sophie Zurstrassen and Hrönn frá Hófgerði won blue ribbons in both T3 Open Group Tölt and V2 Open Group Four Gait. Photo by Jean Ervasti.



The Intermediate Division Champions, Mike Kooyman and Hreyfing frá Minni-Borg. Photo by Jean Ervasti.

you to the following people: A judge, Alex Dannemann; B judge, Alex Pregitzer; IceTest Coordinator, Amy Goddard; Announcer, Susan Peters; Scribes, Cindy Wescott and Susan Moore; Awards Presenter, Emily Potts; Track Steward, Hannah Huss; Barn Steward, Leah Greenberger; Gate Keeper, Brigit Huwyler; Photographers, Heleen Heyning, Jean Ervasti, and Martina Gates; Equipment Checker, Jana Meyer; Lunch/waters, Frost White; Post show clean up crew: Kristjan and Johanna (Thor Icelandics), Charlotte Kooyman, Cindy Wescott, Susan Moore, Brigit Huwyler, and Amy Goddard. It takes a village to make a show like this happen, and we are so, so grateful to our Northeast Icelandic Horse Club community.

We look forward to next year's show, which will be held June 23-24, 2018 at Thor Icelandics. Mark your calendars now, and we hope to see you all there!



Thorunn Kristjánsdóttir and Leslie Chambers, riding Soldís from Mill Farm and Thokki from Four Winds, during their blue-ribbon Pairs in Harmony Ride. Photo by Heleen Heyning.



Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir canters Parker frá Sólheimum; the pair won the V1 Four Gait. Photo by Jean Ervasti.



Veigar frá Lækjamóti, with his rider Terral Hill, Carrie Lyons-Brandt, and their son, Erik. Terral and Veigar won T1 Tölt and took second in V1 Four Gait, making them the Open Level Champions. Photo by Jean Ervasti.



Horses and riders at the NEIHC Open wait for their events in a shady spot below the track at Thor Icelandics in Claverack, NY. Photo by Jean Ervasti.

THE RIDING HORSE PROFILE

BY TINA ANDERSON

When buying an Icelandic horse, what do you think is most important? That the tölt has a clear beat? That the horse is five-gaited? That the horse's movements make everyone else at the stable sigh with admiration? That the horse stands still when mounted? That it is a pinto? That it trusts its rider and, when asked, takes the path to the right in the forest—even though all the other riders turn left?

More than 3,000 riders of Icelandic horses in twelve countries responded to a survey sent out by FEIF's Leisure Riding Committee two years ago. These survey responses, together with existing test models from France, Germany, and Iceland, form the basis of the newly launched FEIF Riding Horse Profile. Says committee chair Lone Høgholt, the main goal of the Riding Horse Profile is to help buyers of Icelandic horses make a qualified choice, one that reflects the needs of the rider and leads to a good life for the horse.



How does the horse you want to buy react to the bustle of a schoolyard? And does that matter to you? The new FEIF Riding Horse Profile provides a snapshot of the character and behavior of the horse—and the needs and abilities of the rider. Photo by Krihn Buijtelaar.

CHARACTER

To most respondents of the FEIF survey, the character of the horse was considered the most important. This was particularly true in continental Europe. In Iceland, though, tölt was given the highest priority. This is understandable: Traffic safety, for example, is probably of more concern in the Netherlands than in Iceland, where traffic is less intense and riding out in nature is more accessible.

In most countries the typical Icelandic horse rider is a leisure rider. A leisure rider usually spends a substantial amount of time riding outside an arena, paddock, or oval track. For the purposes of this project, anyone riding out in nature is a leisure rider.

Leisure riders wish to learn, improve, and develop together with their horse; competition is not really of interest. More often, working with the horse is viewed as a personal development project. The less routine you have as a rider (and this, of course, also applies to competition riders), however, the more difficult it becomes to assess how well your relationship with the horse of your dreams is working out.

A MATCH?

"This horse is ideal for you." The pinto gelding did not look at all the way Lone had expected her very first horse to look. However, he had lovely dark eyes and was very friendly. "He was born 50 kilos too fat, he is a piggy-pacer, but he has a heart of gold, and I think you would make a fine match. I need to train him first and you can pick him up in eight weeks."

Lone tried another very well-educated horse, but the pinto had won her heart. An inexperienced rider and a newly trained four-year-old! But it ended up being a very happy and successful match, well spotted by a professional and honest seller.

Not all buyers of horses are this lucky. Far from all buyers are qualified to make this assessment on their own. This is why the Riding Horse Profile was developed: To create comfort for both seller and buyer and to prevent the negative consequences of a poor match, to the benefit of both seller and buyer—and the horse. The Riding Horse Profile has two main sections, the Rider's Form and the Trainer's Report, and some of the questions in the two are identical. This allows for the quick identification of gaps between the needs of the rider and the character and abilities of the horse. The Trainer's Report also includes additional information on his or her findings.

NEUTRALITY

The Riding Horse Profile thus provides a snapshot of the character and behavior of the horse, as well as of the needs and abilities of the rider. It is factual, neutral, and involves a professional horse trainer or a trusted horse person who understands the rider's needs. There are no "correct" answers or "wrong" conclusions. A horse may be completely wrong for one rider and the perfect match for another.

"We worked on the assumption that professional horse people have insight and knowledge that others do not have. An experienced trainer can establish a good understanding of both the rider and the horse within a couple of hours. The kind of trainer we prefer is one who is familiar with educating and training both riders and horses, and we intend to eventually make this a requirement for use of the Riding Horse Profile," says Lone. "What we have now is version 1.0, and we hope that everybody will embrace it, use it, and collect as much experience as possible. Based on this information, FEIF can develop and launch a more refined and improved version 2.0."

The Trainer's Report will not have the same value if conducted by someone who is not a professional, she notes. Asking a professional trainer to do the job, on the other hand, lets you define your best possible equine partner relatively fast.

EXPECTATIONS

The rider may start by filling in the Rider's Form, describing his or her ideal horse. But an even better start would be to do so together with a trainer or a trusted horse person. It is of paramount importance that both the trainer and the rider be totally honest when filling out the form. How does the rider see herself, and how does the trainer see her needs? What characterizes the ideal horse for this particular rider? Together the two of them fill in the Rider's Form and answer questions relating to behavior on the ground, general characteristics, willingness, and gaits. Then is the time to go and fall in love with a horse!

Once the rider has found her "dream horse," she invites the trainer to prepare the neutral Trainer's Report, based on observing and riding the horse. This part of the Riding Horse Profile has three elements.

Initially the trainer observes the horse on the ground: How easily is the horse caught in the field? How is it when being groomed and saddled? The owner demonstrates this part for the trainer. Second, the trainer rides the horse and gets a feeling for its gaits, educational level, and cooperation. Third, the trainer monitors the horse's reactions to its surroundings: Does the horse react fearfully to walking under branches with leaves, or to plastic or a tarp blowing in the wind? Does it load easily, or do you practically have to carry it on board the horse trailer?



It's not bad if a riding horse reacts to a kid on a bouncing ball. How he reacts helps you, as the horse's seller, find the right buyer for him. A horse may be completely wrong for one rider and the perfect match for another. Photo by Krihn Buijtelaar.

SAFETY

There is no guarantee, of course, that the same behavioral results will be achieved three months later. A good horse can be ruined in no time by the wrong rider or owner. But using the FEIF Riding Horse Profile can make clearly wrong choices happen less often.

The Riding Horse Profile also challenges the myth that the Icelandic horse is for everybody: The truth is, each individual horse is not.

"The average Icelandic horse can't be ridden in high-level competitions in the morning and be a calm leisure horse for a five-year-old in the afternoon. These horses do exist; however, they are extremely rare. Some people still believe that they are buying a teddy bear, but an Icelandic horse is a horse! It is, moreover, a tough horse, having survived under rough conditions," says Lone. "Some people say that an Icelandic horse is, in many ways, closer to nature than other breeds, as they have been systematically bred with a focus on a special use for 200 to 300 years. Breeding in Iceland is relatively young as a focused discipline."

Your Icelandic horse isn't a teddy bear. You do not become a national champion because your newly bought horse has been a champion. You will not be riding comfortably in nature on a very sensitive horse, which instantly reacts to your lightest signal, if this precision makes you nervous and makes you put on the brakes. If you are troubled by back problems, your ideal horse may be a soft five-gaited horse and not one with impressive movements. If you are insecure and have little routine, it may be a good solution to look for a well trained, mature horse with clear gaits.

When buying an Icelandic horse, you need to reach out for help to make the right choice. It's all about safety for you and a good life for the horses.

A version of this story originally appeared in Tölt, Denmark. *Used by permission of FEIF. Download the Riding Horse Profile forms here: https://www.feif.org/Service/Documents/Leisure-Riding.aspx*



Every horse will react, in some way, to something. Matching the right horse to the right rider is a matter of matching energy levels and expections. Photo by Krihn Buijtelaar.

A TEST PROFILE

BY LINDA TEMPLETON

In late June, Red Feather Farm held a clinic with International Breeding Judge Arnar Bjarki Sigurðarson from Sunnuhvoll in Selfoss, during which we had an opportunity to conduct a test of the new FEIF Riding Horse Profile. It was a very interesting process to go through, more intensive and more revealing than I expected.

THE RIDER'S FORM

The first part of the profile is a form to be filled out by the rider—the prospective horse buyer.

We found that this rider's self assessment would benefit greatly if it were a joint discussion or effort between the rider and his or her trainer. Often riders are not objective about their own riding, either under- or overestimating their skills and education. Riders also tend to select their ultimate goals vs. their current reality.

We strongly suggest having a trainer who has worked with the rider participate in the self-assessment portion of the Rider's Form, as this is the critical foundation from which the horse-shopping commences.

We also would like to see the addition of information regarding how the rider likes to ride: frequency, distance, alone, with groups, on trails, in arenas, endurance, etc. All this information is valuable for making the perfect horse-and-rider match.

THE TRAINER'S FORM

The Trainer's Form includes three parts that require the assistance of a professional horse trainer who represents the buyer:

1. Owner portion, for which the horse's owner fetches the horse, grooms and tacks it, and rides it, showing all gaits.

2. Trainer portion, for which the trainer rides, resaddles, remounts, rides with and away from other horses, and rides gait transitions.

3. Introducing New Elements portion, for which the trainer and or potential buyer should choose several elements (opening an umbrella, water crossing, riding through branches) to determine the reactivity and willingness of the horse.



Arnar Bjarki Sigurðarson, shown here riding Elska from Red Feather, helped test the FEIF Riding Horse Profile at Red Feather Farm in June. Photo by Árný Oddbjörg Oddsdóttir.

Each of these three parts have linear checklists associated with them, to help the trainer and buyer assess the suitability of that particular horse.

We found the Trainer's Report to be quite thorough, including relevant factors such as the weather that day, whether the horse was away from home or in a familiar environment, and the overall condition of the horse (though a linear scale on condition would be good to add).

The Trainer's Report ranks the horse's educational level and its gait quality. It addresses the ease of getting the gaits, speed range, beat, and how relaxed the horse is in each gait. This information is hard for the average horse buyer to assess alone.

FOR BUYER OR SELLER?

Based on our test, the question arose as to who should do this and why. Before starting, we viewed the Riding Horse Profile more as a buyer's tool, as that value is obvious. As we progressed, however, we began to see that it has equal or greater value as a seller's tool.

For the seller, having this profile conducted on your horses by an unbiased trainer provides a report card on the strengths and weaknesses of your horses. Yes, it is a report from one point in time, and yes, we see where one might want to do this annually or on some regular basis, but what a fantastic tool to have available to share with potential buyers that your horse has been professionally assessed, and to have the results in hand. We felt like it was the difference between a used car and a certified pre-owned car, where you have the 30-point checklist and provide full transparency to the buyer.

For the buyer, the analogy would be the same. It's the difference between answering a Craig's List ad and meeting in a parking lot to check out a used car, vs. dealing with a reputable used-car dealer and gaining insight on the car's history and current condition. It's the difference between "I hope it tölts" and "I know it tölts."

Will we use the Riding Horse Profile on a regular basis at Red Feather? Absolutely. I hope others will as well.

THE RIDER'S WEIGHT

BY NANCY MARIE BROWN



If you ride Icelandic horses in America, you've probably heard a comment like that. One year my husband and I took our two Icelandics to an annual all-breed trail ride sponsored by the Vermont Horse Council. We'd just finished a hot but leisurely loop of about eight miles and were hosing our horses down when a big man on a big Quarter Horse rode up.

"What do you do with those little things? They pull a cart?"

"We ride them," said my husband.

"You ride that?"

The big man and his big horse walked off. Years later, my husband (who is 5' 9" and weighs about 155 lb, or 70 kg) still fumes when he remembers that remark.

But it's also true that some Icelandic horse stables, in both America and Iceland, put an upper limit on a rider's weight. For example, the company I work with, America2Iceland, requires that riders for its clinics and treks weigh less than 200 lb (about 91 kg).

To complicate matters further a friend of mine, Guðmundur (Mummi) Skúlason from Hallkellstaðahlíð, who stands over 6' tall and weighs 92 kg (about 202 lb), is a professional Icelandic horse trainer. Is he too big for his horses?

THE HOLAR STUDY

In 2014, researchers in the department of Equine Science at Hólar University College, Iceland devised a way to answer these sorts of questions. The study became part of the 2015 Ph.D. dissertation of assistant professor Guðrún Jóhanna Stefánsdóttir, and in March 2017 it was published, in two parts, in the European journal *Animal* by Guðrún, her Hólar colleagues Víkingur Gunnarsson and Sveinn Ragnarsson, and Lars Roepstorff and Anna Jansson of the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. The project was financed by Iceland's Stock Protection Fund for the Icelandic Horse, the Developmental Fund for Icelandic Horse Breeding, the Pálmi Jónsson Natural Conservation Fund, and Hólar University College. (See below for a link to the full text of the papers.)

The experiment took place outside on the oval track at Hólar from June 2-6, 2014, using eight of Hólar's school horses (four mares and four geldings). The horses ranged from 15 to 19 years old, stood between 138 and 144 cm tall (about 13.2 to 14.1 hands), and weighed (before their morning feed) from 340 to 382 kg (750 to 842 lb). All were in their summer coats. They were examined clinically and their body condition was scored the day before the test and for two days afterward.

To test the effects of the rider's weight on an Icelandic horse, researchers at Hólar in Iceland enlisted rider Fredrica Fagerlund and eight of the horses used in the college's equestrian sciences program. The tests mimicked a common day's exercise for an Icelandic horse carrying a rider weighing between 20% and 35% of the horse's body weight. Photo by Sveinn Ragnarsson.

To isolate the effect of the rider's weight—and to exclude any effects of riding ability or style—the same professional rider rode each of the horses. Fredrica Fagerlund, who had just received her BS degree from Hólar, weighs 65 kg (143 lb) and is 177 cm tall (almost 5'10"). She used the same saddle, a customized Ástund Super, and was told to ride each horse the same way, sitting deep in the saddle and using minimal aids to keep the horse in medium speed, clear-beat tölt for a distance of 642 meters (about four-tenths of a mile) for each test phase.

The test had five phases. Between each phase, Fredrica dismounted so that her weight could be changed—to equal 20% of the horse's weight, then 25%, 30%,

35%, and finally back to 20%—by adding or subtracting lead weights. The researchers put lead bricks into bags sewn onto the saddle, used soft lead saddle pads, taped lead bricks to her stirrups, and finally made Fredrica wear a scuba-diver's vest filled with lead to reach the highest weight. The weights were added equally side-to-side and front-to-back so that they would not affect the rider's balance.

The researchers monitored the horses' (and the rider's) heart rate, temperature, and breathing, and took blood samples (via a catheter inserted in the horse's neck) after each phase, as well as after several recovery periods. They monitored the horses' speed, using a wireless mic and earpiece to tell Fredrica to speed up or slow down. In addition, the horses wore sensors on their legs and croup, and the tests were recorded by high-speed video camera, allowing Hólar assistant professor Víkingur Gunnarsson to later analyse characteristics of the horses' stride.

COMMENTS

Reading the published reports, a couple of points unrelated to the actual results stood out for me. Given Hólar's reputation in Icelandic equine sciences, these can be considered "best practices":

First, the total distance Fredrica rode was 4,310 meters (a little over 2.5 miles). The researchers considered this "a common 1-day exercise for an adult Icelandic riding horse." It included a 10-minute warm-up (5 minutes of walking and 5 minutes of slow tölt in circles of various sizes, ridden in both directions) and the five stretches of medium-speed tölt (with a 5-minute break, dismounted, between each one).

Second, the horses were in top shape. For the previous four months, they had been used in the university's teaching program by advanced riding students. Then they were given a one-week break and allowed to graze on pasture with free access to a round bale of hay. During the experiment, they were kept in large box stalls on sawdust bedding and each fed about 1 kg (2 lb) of grass hay, along with a mineral supplement. They had free access to fresh water and a salt block. The testing was done in the mornings, and the horses were allowed to graze outside on pasture for three to four hours each afternoon.

RESULTS

In general, as the researchers had predicted, the heavier the rider, the harder the horse had to work.

Heart rate increased by an average of 7 beats per minute for every 10% increase in Body Weight Ratio (BWR). But when the BWR returned to 20%, in the last phase of the test, the horse's heart rate also dropped to about the same rate as it had been for the first phase (also at 20% BWR). In all cases, the horse's heart rate was back to resting level 30 minutes after the test was over.

Breathing frequency also increased, and in this case it did not drop when the BWR returned to 20% at the end of the test. But, again, within 30 minutes it was back to resting level.

The horse's temperature remained a little high even after the 30-minute recovery period was over.

The blood tests produced two interesting results: First, the hematocrit (Hct) levels did not change at all during the exercise test. A hematocrit test reveals the level of red blood cells (by volume) in the blood. Since red blood cells carry oxygen, the amount of red blood cells released from the spleen, the researchers explain, "reflects the intensity of exercise until maximum splenetic contraction is reached." Yet, according to the Hólar tests, "Hematocrit (%) was not affected by BWR." This may indicate, the researchers write, "that the horses were close to their maximum Hct"—that is, their spleens were already producing as many red blood cells as possible with the lightest weight of rider (20% BWR). Some individual scores, however, showed that the smaller the horse, the larger the Hct. "This indicates that smaller horses had higher aerobic capacity," the researchers write, "due perhaps to having been subjected to more intensive training (i.e., carrying comparatively heavier weights) than the larger horses" all their lives.

The second interesting result from the blood tests was that the concentration of lactate (Lac) in the blood plasma increased exponentially. Lactate (or lactic acid) is produced during exercise as the body breaks down glucose for energy; the level of lactate concentration in blood plasma is thus a measure of fatigue. The Hólar study was the first, the researchers write, "to assess a weight threshold at which lactate rapidly accumulates (W_4) in a group of horses." That threshold, on average, was 23% BWR. At a body-weight ratio higher than 23%, the length of time at which the horses could stay in medium-speed tölt was reduced.

"However," the researchers continue, "there was considerable individual variation in W_4 (range 17.5% to 27.5%) despite the use of this uniform group of horses that had been bred, kept, and trained for the same purpose at the same place (Hólar University College) all their life." Some of the horses reached the fatigue threshold at a BWR of only 17.5%. Others could carry a much heavier rider—up to 27.5% BWR—before reaching the threshold. "This indicates that individual and genetic



In the tests, Fredrica's weight was systematically changed by adding lead bricks to the saddle (in specially made pouches) or taping them to the stirrups. A lead saddle pad and a lead-weighted vest were used to reach the highest weights, equaling 35% of the horse's body weight. Photo by Sveinn Ragnarsson.

factors could have a substantial effect on W_4 and weight carrying capacity."

CONCLUSIONS

What could those individual and genetic factors be? Strangely, the researchers found no correlation between the two most obvious ones—the horse's height or its weight—and its ability to carry a heavy rider.

The only factor that did correlate was the condition of the horse's back muscles. To judge the horse's back, the researchers used a slightly modified version of one part of the Henneke Body Condition Score, the Back BCS. On a horse with a back score of 4, for example, the spine is prominent; a back scored 4.5 is slightly rounded; while one scored 4.75 is nearly flat.

"The results indicate that back or *Musculus longissimus dorsi* conformation could be important for weight carrying ability, since W_4 increased with Back BCS," they write. "This could indicate that horses with more 'muscular' backs either had support from more aerobic muscle tissue or that their muscle tissue was larger or better at metabolizing lactate during exercise."





To reach 35% of the horse's body weight, slender Fredrica had to wear a heavy, lead-filled vest—it took two men to dress her in it. The saddle (left) was also made heavier, with lead weights in the blue pouches. Finally, beneath the saddle was a lead-filled saddle pad. Photos by Sveinn Ragnarsson.

When they analyzed the horses' gaits, the researchers found that the extra weight had no effect on beat, symmetry, or leg lift. Weight did, however, make the horses' strides shorter and more frequent, lengthened the stance time in each stride, and decreased the overall quality of the tölt.

For me, the Hólar study has several take-home messages. I am 5'8" (172 cm) and weigh 140 lb (64 kg); my saddle is an Ástund Super, which according to the researchers weighs 18.5 lb (8.4 kg). I ride a rather small Icelandic, who if measured generously is 13.1 hands (134 cm) and 750 pounds (340 kg), giving us a 21% (or higher) BWR. She is now 15 years old. If I want to enjoy riding her for a long time, I need to keep her in top physical shape and pay special attention to the condition of her back muscles. And I need to keep in mind that a "common 1-day exercise for an adult Icelandic riding horse" is 2.5 miles (4,310 meters) at medium-speed tölt, with ample unmounted rest times.

"For a longer ride," Guðrún told me over email, "it is important to limit the speed and to intersperse the ride with more walk and/or rest times to burn the lactate and restore energy."

And while she pointed out that the horses in the Hólar study "coped well with the exercise test when carrying a rider weighing up to 35% of their body weight," she stressed that "it is important to keep in mind the interplay of the rider's weight, the speed, and the distance ridden. The heavier the rider, the more aware he or she should be of how fast and/or how long he or she rides."

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BREEDING GÆÐINGAR

BY MARTINA GATES

The Icelandic horses we breed today will be the Icelandic horses of tomorrow. That is the impetus behind the new Gæðingar Club.

There has been a steady decline in the number of Icelandic horses bred in North America over the last few years, but the quality has improved considerably. This is a trend in the right direction. Having access to better breeding horses and using all the opportunities that are out there to improve the outcome is exactly what will help the Icelandic horse to thrive.

Our neighbors in Canada have added to the good gene pool and have been putting on breed evaluations regularly. I dream of the day when the U.S. and Canada produce high first-prize horses that can compete with the best in Europe.



The number of Icelandic horses bred in North America has declined in recent years, but the quality has improved. Photo by Martina Gates.

BRAINSTORMING

Other people have that dream too. So what happens when a bunch of horse-breeding fanatics start brainstorming? They come up with ingenious ideas. That is exactly what happened last year in the USIHC Breeding Committee.

Although we were just a handful of dedicated individuals, we all had issues related to breeding that were outside the function of the committee. The USIHC Breeding Committee, with its few members, is not responsible for the promotion of stallions or their offspring. It does not have the function of helping to market breeding farms, of creating a setting in which breeders can discuss horses for sale, or even of hosting educational events. There are so many breeders in this country that are not part of the discussion that revolves around breeder's issues.

Within the committee we felt a need for likeminded spirits to congregate and share ideas, so we decided to create a breeding club. How? In the past, Regional Clubs were the only clubs affiliated with the USIHC. Activity clubs did not exist. So a small group of us requested that the USIHC Board recognize affiliated activity clubs. There was great joy when the Board granted our request on April 15. We saw a huge opportunity to include all Icelandic horse breeders and to broaden their input.

When choosing a name for our club, we came up with "Gæðingar" fairly fast. It was really the most appropriate name, as every Icelandic horse breeder dreams of breeding such a horse. Gæðingur, in Icelandic, is the word for a horse with perfectly fluid gaits and great character: A king among the breed! The plural is Gæðingar.

ICEBREEDERS

Horse breeding is not for the faint-hearted, as it requires knowledge, patience, and money. We know that producing great horses begins with excellent breeding stock and ends in excellent training. But to go full circle requires commitment. All too often horses are bred but the training is lacking, which is partly due to training costs and partly due to access to trainers. Another issue is selling the horses that have been bred.

The new USIHC-affiliated Gæðingar Club offers an open dialogue for all Icelandic horse breeders. It gives us a chance to promote the breed, our horses, our farms, and events. It also enables us to have one central place in which all Icelandic horse breeders can list their sales horses and their stallions and mares for lease. This central information center gives buyers the chance to see what is available without having to browse dozens of websites. Smaller breeders don't have to worry that they are getting lost by not having an extensive website. Everyone has the chance to be seen and heard.

Since creating the club we have

launched our website (www.icebreeders.com) and are continuously adding farms, breeding horses, and sales horses. We have a members-only discussion space on the website that is great if breeders have thoughts or questions they would like to discuss. On the website we are also compiling a calendar of events and a series of news articles of interest to Icelandic horse breeders.

BREEDING NEWS

For example, in one of our first news stories, posted May 19, Linda Templeton looked at the question of quantity vs. quality. "Oh, the joys of breeding and so little of it?" she writes. "Our gross numbers are in steady decline, but our average BLUP (an indicator of quality) has been steady and slightly on the rise."

Linda made bar graphs comparing foals born in the U.S., Canada, Iceland, Sweden, and Germany. (You can see them here: https://www.icebreeders.com/single-post/2017/05/19/Quality-versus-Quantity) "We can see that the U.S. has a consistently higher average BLUP and that the number is trending up," Linda writes. "The low end of our BLUP ranges are quite similar. Review the percentage of foals for each country with BLUP scores of 100+ and 105+."

She also notes, "I was pleasantly surprised at the results between the U.S. and Germany." According to the graphs, the U.S. in 2016 produced about 20 foals, with an average BLUP score of 106, while Germany produced over 2,000, with an average BLUP score of 103.5. "The U.S. has lower high-end BLUP scores …, but considering our vast geography and considerably smaller pool of numbers, I was encouraged. You'll note the average BLUPs in the U.S. and Germany are very similar, as is the low end."

Linda next investigated the stallions and mares being bred in the U.S. She found that "stallions with BLUPs of low 80s have been and are being used, as well as mares. Some of the reasoning for this is geography … and sadly, cost, saving a few hundred dollars on a stud fee that will likely result in a less talented horse. One observation, in the farms with consistently low BLUP foals, is that the stallion choice is usually not diverse and a 'farm' stallion is being used, where no outside fee is involved. This is a potential area for significant and immediate improvement. The issue we have to consider is our future trends: 90-BLUP horses that are produced this year can be bred in four years, producing at the same or lower level, if that horse owner is not educated as to the reasons and advantages of selecting the best possible mate for their horse."

If this sort of discussion triggers your interest—or if you are an Icelandic horse breeder and you wonder what they're talking about—then the Gæðingar Club is for you. It's a place to learn and share and argue and improve.

JOIN THE CLUB

The Gæðingar Club has five board members: former USIHC breeding leader Katrin Sheehan (president), breeder and USIHC board member Linda Templeton (vice president), current USIHC breeding leader Kydee Sheetz (secretary), breeder and former *Tölt News* and *StudBook* publisher Martina Gates (treasurer), and breeder Susy Oliver (promotion). These are all people with a history in breeding and a determination to further the Icelandic horse breed.

The members are already sharing great ideas, and our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/gaedingarclub/) is constantly updated as well. There are plans for young horse assessments, breeding shows, breeding clinics, and an annual meeting. We invite all breeders and those interested in breeding Icelandic horses to join the Gæðingar Club (www.icebreeders.com/membership-signup).

This activity club model has endless opportunities for other likeminded groups, as it reaches across states and borders. Who knows, the future could see a pleasure riding club, a training club, a driving club, a show club, and many more.

As the motto on our homepage says, "Ambition is the first step towards success."

WHAT'S AN AFFILIATED CLUB?

BY LESLIE CHAMBERS

The USIHC began acknowledging Regional Clubs over 15 years ago. The original vision of clubs recognized and sanctioned by the national organization included the provision to accept "activity" clubs. The idea of the national organization, the USIHC, recognizing Regional Clubs makes a lot of sense. The idea of an activity club being recognized as one of the Regional Clubs did not make as much sense, but was never an issue, as no activity club had ever applied for recognition until now.

So the Regional Club Committee decided to make some name changes. We are now the Affiliated Clubs, as the term Affiliated can encompass both Regional Clubs (generally based on geography) and Activity Clubs (based on special interest). The application and renewal forms for clubs remain largely unchanged.

In short, the USIHC encourages:

Membership in a Regional Club for the many benefits and local support that these associations provide.

Membership in Activity Clubs, as these associations provide members with opportunities to educate themselves on an activity and provide a forum for discussion with others who share that interest.



Photo by Martina Gates.

THE HEALING POWER OF HORSES

BY THERESA J. JORDAN • PHOTOS BY BARRY KOSTER

Horses have an amazing ability to heal our emotional wounds. Among these are Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Our understanding of PTSD has improved greatly in recent years. In this article, I'll discuss how two forms of PTSD develop and how people with PTSD heal and move into post-traumatic growth. Much of how horses can heal us pertains to all breeds of horses. However as you read this article, you will undoubtedly recognize how outstandingly good our breed is in understanding us, reading our emotions, and contributing to our healing. My guess about what makes Icelandic horses such superb healers is that, unlike most other breeds, our horses have developed in an environment devoid of predators. Without the need to be hypervigilant, i.e. scanning the environment for life-threatening predators, they can focus more intensely on us.



"Bonding is crucial between horses and humans, if healing of humans is to occur," says Terry Jordan. "The horse's ability to perceive human emotions and the human's ability to accept those perceptions are the crux of the healing process."

How can horses heal us? For quite some time we have known that horses are much better at processing emotions than humans are. In fact, horses are estimated to be 300% better at processing our emotions than we are ourselves. However, what makes horses so much better at understanding us has only recently become clear. It's called interspecies mirroring.

About 20 years ago, neuroscientists discovered "mirror neurons." These specialized neurons exist in the brains of humans, as well as in other animals including horses. Mirror neurons become active when a human or other animal takes some form of action which is perceived by another human or animal. Mirror neurons are thought to be a crucial source for such important emotions as compassion and empathy, both within and across species. Since we do not speak the same verbal language as horses, most horse-human communication is nonverbal, through body language. Their mirror neurons enable horses to accurately read even the most subtle human body language, including our unconscious body language. Regardless of what we say to them in our human verbal language, horses interpret our intentions almost solely through what our bodies are telling them. This means that horses have the ability to detect a human's true feelings, regardless of whether we ourselves are in touch with those feelings or not. This amazing capacity of horses—more than any other animal—to mirror our true feelings lets them heal people whose emotional pain is deeply hidden from other humans and, perhaps, from themselves.

I once watched an experienced equine therapist work with a group of people suffering from both drug addiction and psychological problems. As each person approached a therapy horse to groom it, I noticed that some horses stood in place while others moved away from the human and yet others moved toward him or her. The human behaviors seemed virtually identical to me—choosing a brush and walking over to a horse—and the horses had been selected to be calm and ready for their jobs. But the horses were clearly processing much more than "human approaching with brush." After attempting to groom their horses for a period of time, everyone gathered together to talk about what had happened. Some people were crying, while others were confused, and still others seemed calm and content. What struck me most strongly was that two people who were crying said that everyone in the human world avoided them—just as their horses had, stepping away when they approached with their grooming tools. The horses were processing very subtle differences in body language among the humans in that group, and reacting accordingly. The people whose horses stepped away later revealed very deep emotional pain over feeling rejected, unloved, or undesired by other humans. Although many therapy sessions had preceded this equine experience, their deep feelings of pain and rejection had not emerged until their assigned horses had mirrored the very thing they feared the most and had kept most deeply hidden.

We find ourselves at the wonderful start of the use of horses to heal deep-seated emotional problems. While hippotherapy originated years ago in Germany, it was

intended to be more physical than psychological. What follows are some examples of Icelandic horses working to heal humans suffering from PTSD.

ICELANDIC HORSE HEALERS

As a clinical psychologist, I have long relied on therapy dogs to perform services, to provide comfort, and even to help me diagnose difficult problems. Having relocated to my own ranch, where I can engage my Icelandic horses in therapeutic activities, I have learned how amazingly well they also perform as healers.

A woman I'll call Barbara serves as an excellent example of how horses can heal humans. Barbara suffered a non-riding accident, a fall in which she hit her head on a very hard surface and experienced a traumatic brain injury. Her brain injury put an immediate stop to her competitive riding, as well as to her well-paying job as a specialized medical practitioner. As is typical in the case of a brain injury, Barbara found herself spiraling into a deep depression accompanied by additional symptoms of PTSD.

When she walked into my office a year ago, she was in a state of utter despair, having felt that she had lost everything that made her herself. "Where is Barbara?" she asked me. "Will the Barbara that I and my husband knew and loved ever return?"

Barbara loved horses, though she was not familiar with Icelandics. The thoroughbreds with which she came into contact tended to be skittish when Barbara lost her balance while walking around them or spoke in ways altered by her brain injury or her PTSD. We began a course of equine therapy with two of my therapy-registered Icelandic horses. Barbara quickly realized that no matter how bad her day had been, or how much grief she was experiencing, the Icelandics treated her with the same love, trust, and respect with which they treated non-PTSD humans. With these two horses, so adept at processing her emotions, Barbara began the slow process of post-traumatic growth. When Barbara is once again ready to get back in the saddle, it will happen on an Icelandic horse, one of the therapy horses with whom she continues to bond regularly each week.

Another of my current cases is a woman I'll call Patty, who had suffered the tragic loss of her young daughter through a deliberate act of murder. Patty's PTSD has evolved from complex grieving into a paralyzing set of symptoms including severe depression, anxiety, and inability to function as she had prior to the tragedy. While Patty had not previously been a horsewoman, adding equine therapy with my Icelandic horses has enabled her to develop a scheduled life once again. In her case, as for numerous other people with PTSD, she recognizes that regular contact with a particular horse is essential to bonding, so she has worked out a schedule for being at the ranch each morning at feeding time. The throaty greetings from her chosen therapy horse when she arrives each morning is the single thing that Patty says gets her out of bed and going each day.

Those of us without PTSD sometimes go to see our horses on days when we are exhausted from work, or carelessly dressed in clothes that are better suited to mopping floors than interacting with anyone who might notice, or when we need emotional support from someone who will not pass judgment on us for our depression, grieving, anxiety, or hopelessness. Other humans rarely meet our need for emotional closeness when we look and feel like a human disaster area. Whether we have a high level of education and a wonderful profession, or are jobless and even homeless, these factors matter not at all to our horse companions.

Why do these things, which make such a difference in so many of our interactions with humans, matter so little when we interact with our horses? The answer is most likely that once we have bonded with our horses they provide us with the incredible and very rare gift of unconditional love.

STRESS DISORDERS

PTSD often leads humans to desire isolation from other humans. People suffering from severe PTSD may spend entire days in bed attempting to hide from their emotional pain, which pursues them every waking hour. Parents with young children cannot tolerate the movement and noise that previously were a source of joy. People with PTSD are troubled by depression, anxiety, panic attacks, insomnia, appetite problems, and a broad range of other symptoms depending on the type of PTSD.

We have learned a great deal about PTSD over the past 15 years. Before that, the mental health profession recognized only one type of PTSD, often called type A, which is brought about by a single, devastating event. This is the type of PTSD we often diagnose in military populations, police, and first responders. A classic example is being in the vicinity of tragedy on 9/11 when the Twin Towers went down. A similar PTSD can result from a car accident or a fall from a horse. As you consider past experiences which might have triggered your own anxiety about getting back in the saddle, understand that a temporary increase in anxiety, fear, or even panic is not necessarily the same as PTSD. There are many ways to work with lessening what mental health professionals consider to be "state" anxiety, i.e. anxiety that is triggered by approaching



Terry and her Icelandic mare, Maistjarna, in "an unusual bonding situation," Terry says. "She was having her uterus flushed by the vet and her choice during this rather uncomfortable procedure was to rest her chin on my chest, where she was clearly the most relaxed and trusting."

or reexperiencing the events surrounding an accident. If our increase in anxiety was triggered by a fall from a horse, simply lacing up our paddock boots in the safety of our home can be sufficient to raise our heart rates, change our breathing to rapid and shallow, and cause us to dread what we previously found delightful.

In contrast to state anxiety, PTSD is not so easily treated by brief behavior modification techniques, short term cognitive behavioral interventions, or temporary use of anti-anxiety medications. PTSD may last for a very long time, even a lifetime if untreated, and is likely to pervade multiple if not all situations in our lives. Someone with PTSD is not the person who begins to develop feelings of stress and worry only as she laces up her paddock boots to go out to the barn after having recently eaten dirt when her horse spooked and spun. She is more likely the person who is terrified of going out in public and, when out with others, is constantly on edge—something called hypervigilance. When we are chronically vigilant, looking for and fearing that the worst will happen, ordinary life experiences of nearly all kinds become unpleasant or downright terrifying.

More recently, the mental health profession has learned of another, very pervasive type of PTSD often called type B. This type of PTSD is chronic and complex, often the result of emotional, verbal, physical, or sexual abuse either during childhood or in the context of a committed relationship. A diagnosis of PTSD requires actual or threatened exposure to death, serious injury, or sexual violation which can be either experienced firsthand or witnessed happening to someone else. Both forms of PTSD require the assistance of a mental health professional in order to heal or to manage better the negative after-effects of the triggering events.

There is one important question which continually arises among equestrians who are suffering from PTSD or a less traumatic stress-related emotional difficulty. That question has to do with our horses' incredibly powerful capacity to process our emotions, as was discussed above. The question goes like this: If I feel such terrible anxiety all the time, and I go out to be with horses, won't they sense my anxiety and, therefore, become terribly fearful themselves? In other words, how can horses possibly help heal someone who is suffering from severe PTSD without mirroring the depression and anxiety experienced by the human?

BONDING

Because horses do not have a sophisticated verbal vocabulary to encode thoughts and memories, we believe they think and remember in pictures. When horses perceive images of humans, the bulk of their perceptions are focused on our emotional intentions. As prey animals, knowing the intentions of whatever approaches them is essential for their survival. Do we approach them with a threat in mind? Or do we approach intending to do something for them rather than to them? Remember that humans are the ultimate predators, the only creatures known to kill their own kind for reasons other than self-defense or food. While Icelandic horses have been bred for more than a millennium in the absence of other predators, they have been cared for, loved, used, and abused by humans.

Watch horses sleep lying prone in their pastures. Note that it is very common for one horse to lie down in the grass while her pasture mate stands alert. Essentially, the horse who is awake and alert is standing guard over her sleeping and, therefore, more vulnerable companion. A solitary horse is often an unhappy horse, so if we keep only one horse we often seek a pasture mate such as a burro, a goat, or even a cat. Horses are born to bond. When a mare who has given birth to a foal immediately licks and nuzzles its full body, she is engaging in the bonding process. One of the places on the horse's body which appears to be greatly sensitive to affectionate touch is the withers, right at the base of the mane. Mares spend a good amount of time nuzzling that spot, as do pasture pals. While it is true that horses cannot reach that particular location on their own bodies, they also are unable to reach other areas along their backs. Watch two Icelandic horses who have recently been introduced to each other. After some initial ear pinning and status arguments, the newly developing friends groom and nuzzle each other at precisely that spot on their withers, exchanging affection as well as the favor of scratching an itch.

Just as bonding is critical among horses, it is crucial between horses and humans if healing of humans is to occur. The horse's ability to perceive human emotions and the human's ability to accept those perceptions are the crux of the healing process. As the saying goes, horses never lie. They see what they see, and let us know immediately whether we make them comfortable or scared. It is this ability of horses to reveal to us our own pains and frailties that gives rise to new insights into our emotional lives.

One characteristic of PTSD is the tendency to try to avoid bad memories—the intrusive thoughts and flashbacks that take us back into the terrifying experiences that caused our stress disorders. As I noted above, some people with PTSD will try to stay asleep, that is unconscious, for as long as possible each day. This oversleeping not only drastically impinges on normal living, but often fails to provide relief, because people with stress disorders are frequently troubled by nightmares and night terrors. Another common coping mechanism is continuous, nearly obsessive engagement in a particular task, such as working at a job which requires their attention for as many hours as they can possibly stay engaged or compulsively playing video games for the amount of time others would spend working, studying, or otherwise living their lives. We have learned that meditation, in the form of clearing our minds, tends to be unhelpful for many if not most people with stress disorders. The moment that our minds are conscious and cleared of other tasks, the flashbacks and intrusive thoughts flood in.

So, how does our bonding with horses relieve the pains of PTSD? First, because horses never judge us, except to determine whether or not we are a threat, they don't mind what else we might be doing during our other hours, while other humans are very likely to make negative judgments about what they see as worthless or inappropriate behaviors. Second, when a human begins the bonding process with a horse, our focus switches away from the PTSD intrusions and onto the contact with the horse. Even at this initial point, a process of healing begins. Third, as the bond continues to build, the horse increasingly reveals its understanding of our emotions. As we accept and incorporate equine feedback, our own healing progresses. In human-to-human contact, an overlay of judgment seems inevitable, while our equine therapists heal us without conditions or values. Healing in a context of unconditional acceptance is what horses gift to us.

Theresa J. Jordan, Ph.D. is a licensed clinical psychologist in practice in Aiken, SC at the Aiken Counseling Group and Psychiatry and CEO/owner of Healing Minds Psychology Services. She owns three Icelandic horses and one Swedish warmblood who live at her Red Mares Ranch, where she also keeps several registered therapy dogs. Contact her at 862-250-7515 or redmares@aol.com.

THE START OF EQUINE-ASSISTED THERAPY

BY THERESA J. JORDAN • PHOTOS BY BARRY KOSTER

What follows is a brief explanation of some steps involved in the start of equine therapy, with accompanying photographs that illustrate how the process can work. After the equine contact, which takes approximately an hour, we follow with another hour without the horse during which the emotional reactions are discussed. In this real-life real-time illustration, the Icelandic therapy horse is my gelding Stjarni from Blue Moon; the woman, Laura Koster, had sustained a very severe head injury, suffering debilitating pain and the stresses that accompany such an incident. Her injury was not related to riding and she has never ridden an Icelandic horse. This is a glimpse into her private world of bonding, and the beginning of her process of healing with Icelandic horses. Please note that even for non-mounted equine therapy, a helmet and appropriate footwear are essential. And while it may not look like it in the photos, I continually checked to be sure Laura held the lead line properly, in a safe and appropriate figure-eight type of loop and not wrapped around her hand.



1. Our work begins with Laura approaching her therapy horse in his natural surroundings, in this case, his paddock. What you cannot see is that as she slowly walked toward the paddock, Stjarni tölted toward her, meeting her at the fence line.



2. Next, Laura opens the gate and uses a lead line to bring him toward the barn where his grooming supplies are kept.



3. She begins the bonding by gradually touching him all over, eventually following my example for lifting and cleaning his hooves.





4. After this initial contact, both she and Stjarni find a way to make clear to each other that a pleasant bond has begun to form. Notice the expressions on both of their faces, and the mutual desire for close contact.

5. Next, she walks him briefly using the lead line as they are passed by my dressage trainer, Gonzalo Garcia, exercising my 18-hand Swedish warmblood mare, Catalyst Cinnabar. Laura and Stjarni are already sufficiently comfortable with each other that the Icelandic horse is not bothered or startled by the approach of the big mare.



6. Seeing how well the connection between horse and human is progressing, I suggest that we move into his stall where I assist her in learning how to place an Icelandic saddle on his back.



From my perspective, this was a particularly lovely equine-assisted therapy session, since bonding and joy are apparent in the body language and facial expressions of both horse and human. What followed was an hour of conversation about Laura's experiences with Stjarni, which revealed that the best possible outcome had, in fact, occurred: She truly felt a bond beginning to form with this horse and clearly perceived that he also enjoyed the contact with her. She reports looking forward to many such hours with her new equine companion and the unconditional acceptance she believes she received from him. As her healing progresses, I expect that Stjarni will have the privilege of being the first horse of any breed she mounts post-injury.

Laura specifically asked to be identified in this article and photographed during her first equine-assisted therapy session. Laura has long had the ability to communicate with dogs, but has previously acted as rescuer. This was her first experience being on the receiving end of treatment by an equine. She will be finishing a credentialing process and begin serving as an animal-assisted therapy specialist for my practice, Healing Minds Psychology Services.

7. Since this equine therapy does not involve mounted work, she proceeds to remove his tack and walk him back to his paddock.

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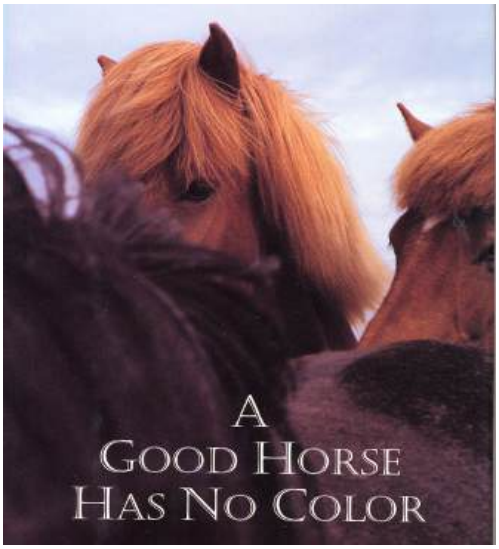
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FARM LIST

The owners of the farms listed below have offered to have you visit in order to become acquainted with the Icelandic horse. Some are breeders, some importers, and some are interested in breed promotion alone. Their listing here does not constitute an endorsement of any kind by the USIHC.

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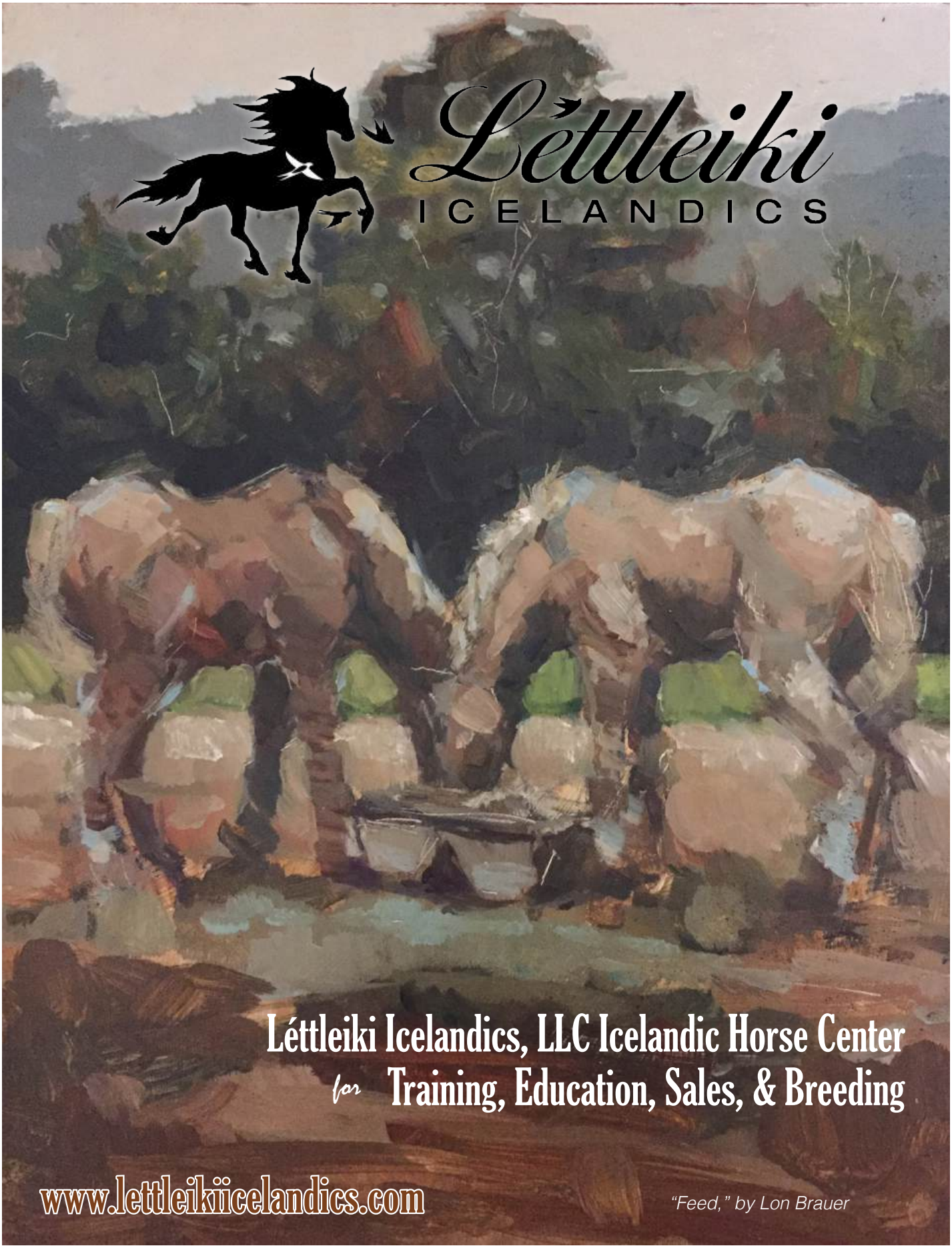
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