

ISSUE ONE

THE

2015

# ICELANDIC HORSE

Q U A R T E R L Y



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



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## NEIHC 2015 Events!



March 7: Annual meeting and Þorablót party in Claverack, NY  
 June: Games Day

July 11-12: The NEIHC Open Sanctioned Show at Thor Icelandics  
 Sept. 18-20: Tolt in Harmony clinic with Trausti at Thor Icelandics



Check website [www.neihc.com](http://www.neihc.com) for dates and more info. See you there!





# THE USIHC MISSION

- Support the use and health of the Icelandic horse according to international standards
- Advance the study, breeding, and exhibition of the Icelandic horse
- Represent FEIF in the United States and represent the United States to FEIF
- Maintain a registry of purebred Icelandic horses

*The U.S. Icelandic Horse Congress is a member of FEIF ([www.feif.org](http://www.feif.org)), the International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations, representing the national Icelandic horse associations of 19 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.*

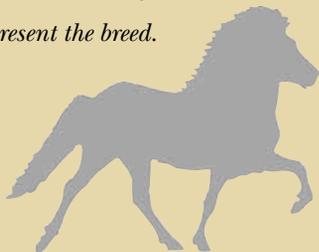


Photo by Andrea Barber

## W H Y J O I N T H E U S I H C ?

### 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 available online.

You have free access to WorldFengur, the worldwide database of all registered Icelandic horses. About 400,000 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 FEIF-certified trainers who are USIHC members and can help you get the best out of your Icelandic horse. In 2014, the Education committee began offering yearly Sport Judges Seminars for those wanting to learn to judge competitions.

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 12 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. USIHC Youth members can apply to participate in the international FEIF Youth Camp or the FEIF Youth Cup. These are great events designed to bring young riders from all 19 FEIF countries 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 prohibited tack and equipment and other necessary information for competition riders.

Sanctioned shows are eligible for funding under the Flagship Event Funding Program. Sanctioned-show organizers have access to the IceTest software to record show scores so that they 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 a beautiful display, brochures, and copies of the *Quarterly*, and will contribute to the cost of the booth and stall space if certain requirements are met.

The new 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.

## 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 are eligible for funding under the Flagship Event Funding Program. 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. Beginning in 2015, 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?

If so, write a proposal. USIHC members are eligible to receive a grant to fund creative projects that meet the USIHC's mission statement. Grant funding is included in the USIHC's annual budget—for 2015, \$8,000 is budgeted. Contact the USIHC president for more information. Contact the USIHC vice president for more information or read about the grant program in Issue Three 2013 of the *Quarterly* on the website.

## JOIN US

There are only about 4,500 registered Icelandic horses in the U.S. and the USIHC, at about 500 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, too, can "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. You can join online or use the form at the back of this magazine.

## QUESTIONS?

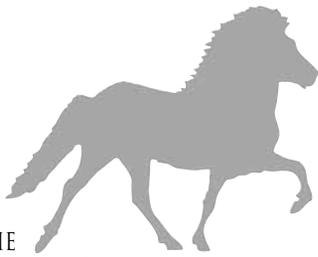
USIHC Board members and Committee chairs are here to answer them. For general questions, call or email our information desk or check the website.

Toll free: 866-929-0009  
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FEIF'S MISSION: FEIF BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER  
IN THEIR PASSION FOR THE ICELANDIC HORSE

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# ICELANDIC HORSE

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ICELANDIC  
HORSE  
QUARTERLY  
Issue One 2015

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**On the cover:** A colorful herd of lucky mares and a foal frolic in a spring pasture at Lough Arrow Icelandics in southern Colorado, with the Sangre de Cristo mountains in the background. Horses, from left to right: Prýði and her foal Morgunrós, Sólný, Gleði (a chestnut roan), Védís, Flúga, Rás, and Blæja (a blue dun roan), all from Lough Arrow II. Breeder Andrea Brodie points out that the percentage of true roans, also known as the intriguing color changers, is only about 0.3 percent in the Icelandic breed. There are very few in the U.S. Andrea welcomes visitors to the farm; please make an appointment by calling (719) 680-2845.

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# FROM THE EDITORS

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## SHARING THE ICELANDIC HORSE

How many people belong to the U.S. Icelandic Horse Congress? Roughly 462 households. How many Icelandic horses are there in the U.S.? That's a harder question to answer, but there are 4598 in the U.S. registry. So unless each USIHC household owns about 10 horses, we're missing some members. And we do need more members.

Why? One reason, of course, is money. Our nest egg was accumulated over many years, and our current Board of Directors is aggressively using it to support the USIHC mission. If you look at our proposed 2015 budget ([www.icelandics.org/bod/141216.pdf](http://www.icelandics.org/bod/141216.pdf)), you'll see that we expect to spend a lot more than we bring in this year.

Another reason is time. Each USIHC committee—Breeding, Education, Pleasure Riding, Promotion, *Quarterly*, Regional Clubs, Sport, and Youth—has projects they are working on that need more volunteers to make them happen. The USIHC is ... you. We have no full-time paid staff. If you think the USIHC isn't doing enough to support the breed in the U.S., contact a committee chair and volunteer to help.

A third reason is pride. As USIHC members, we're proud of our Icelandic horses, and we want to share their wonderful qualities. That's why the Quarterly Committee offered free copies of our first full-color issue to trainers and breeders last March to hand out to their customers. Here's what they told us:

*Jana Meyer:* We loved the free magazines that you sent us last year. They were great handouts for people interested in the breed and the Icelandic Horse Scene. We used them at the Youth Day, Everything Equine in Vermont, a few for new Icelandic horse riders, and had just a couple left for Equine Affaire.

*Florie Miller:* The *Quarterly* is such an excellent promotional tool. Not only is the magazine beautifully designed and informative, it also shows people who are new to the breed what a fun community



It's all about sharing: Jer and Susy Oliver on Skila and Keli from Tölthaven give a breed demonstration to members of a local saddle club in Pelican Rapids, MN. Photo by Nate Oliver.

the Icelandic horse world in America is!

*Karen Winhold:* I love having the extra copies. Some go to the farm and some stay here at the inn on the coffee table. Countless people pick them up and read them, even those who are not horse people. They really help with encouraging interest in the breed. If someone is really interested I give them a copy.

*Lucy Nold:* I have many newbies who are not sure it's worth joining the USIHC as they don't know what they will get from the membership, especially if they don't own a horse. I think getting an issue of the *Quarterly* would sway them for sure!

*Dawn Shaw:* I've been having people here periodically to look at horses I have for sale, or even just to visit and learn about the breed. They are very impressed when I hand them a copy of the *Quarterly*. It's a great good will gesture that builds interest and excitement about the breed. Some of the people who visit have never had Icelandics.

*Carrie Brandt:* With every horse and every lesson package we sell, we include a copy of the *Quarterly*. We also have copies sitting out for visitors and have taken them to expos for people to read. We would love to continue to do this and encourage people to become members.

*Bernie Willis:* Sharing the *Quarterly* does make a difference. Yesterday I sold two horses to a family that did their research, went looking for a horse, and came to me for information. I gave

them a copy of the *Quarterly* and introduced them to our USIHC website and Worldfengur. A couple of days later they came back with checkbook in hand and arranged for lessons and the two horses. They said, "We checked out the horse options on Worldfengur and there's no doubt yours are the best in Alaska." We all know "best" depends upon the use of the horse and the talent of the rider, but these folks used the tools available to meet their needs. It started with a nice magazine.

This year, in a collaboration with the Promotion Committee, every USIHC member can request free copies of the *Quarterly* to hand out to prospective new members for promotion. All you need to do is to send an email request to [promotion@icelandics.org](mailto:promotion@icelandics.org) or call Promotion Director Juli Cole at 724-667-4184.

Please plan ahead for events, as this is a first come, first served offer, until no more copies are left. All we ask in return is that you give the magazine into the hands of prospective new members. Also let us know who you gave them to, if you can, so that we can track our success.

As Bernie Willis told us, "I truly believe that the personal effort is the best way to share our horses. And when I share, I like my horses even more." We agree. We hope you will share the *Quarterly*—and the Icelandic horse.

—Nicki Esdorn and Nancy Marie Brown



## AMERICAN YOUTH CUP

The USIHC, in cooperation with Léttleiki Icelandics in Eminence, KY, is excited to offer the first American Youth Cup. Modeled after the FEIF Youth Cup, this is an opportunity for young riders ages 12-17 to receive ridden instruction and to compete on unfamiliar horses. The event will include a sanctioned show open to riders of any age. The American Youth Cup will open with orientation on July 21, training and preparation on July 22-24, and the American Youth Cup Competition and Open Sanctioned Show on July 25-26. Visit the USIHC website or contact organizer Carrie Lyons Brandt (carrie@lettleikiicelandics.com) or Youth Leader Colleen Monsef at youth@icelandics.org or 408-390-9307 for more information.



Anne-Marie Martin (T2) riding Húni frá Torfunesi. Photo by Sarah Ziller.

## 2015 USIHC MEETING

The 2015 USIHC Annual Members Meeting was to be held at the Radisson Blu hotel at the Mall of America in Minneapolis, MN, on March 7-8. In addition to reports from the Board of Directors and Committee Chairs, the agenda included presentations by award-winning ACTHA riders Eve and Dave Loftness and Cindy Nadler, Laurelyn Turbes of North Wind Equine Veterinary Dental, Certified Equine Rehabilitation Practitioner Gloria Verrecchio, and FEIF International Breeding Judge Barbara Frische. A report on the meeting will be published in the June issue of the *Quarterly*.

## NATIONAL RANKING

Congratulations to the top finishers in the 2014 National Ranking in sport competition: Ásta Covert (T1 and V1), Anne-Marie Martin (T2), Lucy Nold (T3 and V2), Doug Smith (T4), Mitch Martin (T5 and V3), Olivia Rasmussen (T6), Kelly Blough and Tammy Martin (tied T7), Julia Hasenauer (T8), Alicia Flanigan (V5), Emma Erickson (V6), Carrie Lyons Brandt (F1), Kari Pietsch-Wangard (F2).

The USIHC National Ranking is a system to compare results of riders of purebred Icelandic horses at USIHC Sanctioned events all over the U.S. The USIHC Sport Committee started the National Ranking in this form in 2007. It is a continuous system: After each sanctioned show is closed and approved by the Sport

The U.S. National Ranking was announced by the USIHC Sport Committee in early January. Here, Alicia Flanigan (high scorer in V5) rides Funi from Boulder Ridge. Photo by Martina Gates. Other high scorers are featured throughout this section of the *Quarterly*.

Leader, its scores are incorporated into the ranking. For the complete results, see: <http://www.icelandics.org/ranking.php>. For descriptions of the show classes and scores from any sanctioned show, visit [www.icelandics.org](http://www.icelandics.org) and look under "Ride."

The position of a rider in any discipline in the National Ranking is based upon the arithmetic mean of the two best preliminary round results with any horse from the past two years. If a rider chooses



Ásta Covert (T1 and V1) riding Dynjandi frá Dalvík. Photo by Will Covert.

to ride in more than one ranked test in the same group (tölt, four gait, or five gait) at the same event, then his or her score from the most advanced test will be used.

The winner in each discipline receives an Iceberg Award, to keep permanently, and has his or her name inscribed on a



Carrie Lyons Brandt (F1) riding Svali frá Tjörn. Photo by Shaila Sigsgaard.



Doug Smith (T4) riding Álfapór frá Bakkakoti. Photo by Ásta Covert.

wooden plaque as a perpetual award. The winner keeps the plaque for the year. At the end of the year, the plaque is returned to the Sport Committee and a new winner's name is added. The awards are presented each year at the USIHC Annual Meeting.

### SPORT JUDGES SEMINAR

Seventeen people attended the first Sport Judges Seminar, held in Kentucky in October. Eight took the test, of whom three—Deb Cook, Barbara Frische, and Alex Dannenmann—passed both the theoretical and practical portions. Given the success of this first seminar, the Education Committee plans to make it an annual event, held in conjunction with a sanctioned show each year. “This will give interested people the opportunity to get educated, for current judges and scribes to keep their status current, and for new judges to emerge,” notes Education chair Katrin Sheehan.



Emma Erickson (V6) riding Blúnda frá Arakoti at the Hólar Youth Cup 2014. Photo by Lucy Nold.

### YOUNG HORSE ASSESSMENTS

The USIHC's letter concerning the judging of young horses was well received at the FEIF Breeding Judges Committee meeting (see the Board Meeting Minutes report in Issue Four 2014 of the *Quarterly* for the background to this controversy). Specific training for FEIF judges in the Linear System for Young Horse Assessments will commence in 2015, with the first training to be given in Iceland. The hope is to have a list of judges trained, tested, and certified on the FEIF website by 2016.



Julia Hasenauer (T8) and Skuggsjá frá Grafarkoti at the Spring Flying C show. Photo by Lidia Hasenauer.

### 2015 SHOWS

Several shows and breeding evaluations are scheduled for the spring and summer. The Kraftur Club will be holding a show April 18-19 at Mountain Icelandics in California. For information, see <https://krafturclub.wordpress.com> or contact Annette Coulon at [annette@mountainicelandics.com](mailto:annette@mountainicelandics.com).

The annual FIRC Sanctioned Show will be held May 16-17 at Frying Pan Farm Park in Herndon, VA. Judges will be Florian Schneider and Hulda Geirsdóttir. For more information, see <http://firc.us> or contact Pat Moore at [pat.moore81@verizon.net](mailto:pat.moore81@verizon.net).

A USIHC-Sanctioned Breeding Evaluation is tentatively scheduled for May 27-28 at Winterhorse Park in Eagle, WI. As of November, Marlise Grimm from Germany has agreed to judge; a second judge from

Iceland was to be chosen in early 2015. The evaluation will be followed by a Young Horse Evaluation on May 29 and a Sport Competition on May 30-31. For more information, contact Barb Riva at [winterhorse@centurytel.net](mailto:winterhorse@centurytel.net) or 262-594-5152.

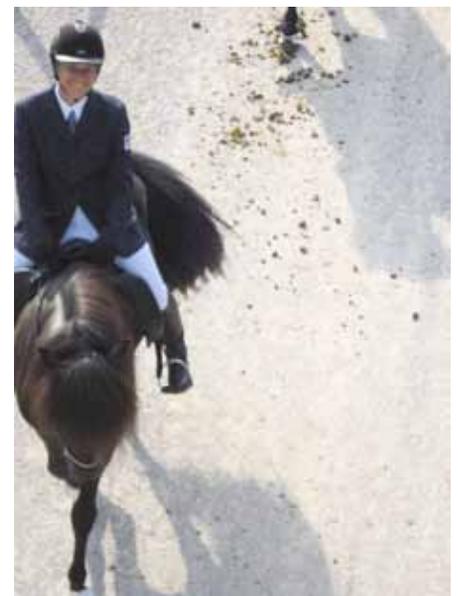
Fitjamyri Farm in Vernon, B.C. is holding a FEIF International Breeding Horse Evaluation on June 20-21. Contact Arnold Faber at 250-309-0504 for information.

The NEIHC's 3rd Annual Open Sanctioned Show will be held at Thor Icelandics in Claverack, NY on July 11-12. Contact Leslie Chambers at [lchambers17@comcast.net](mailto:lchambers17@comcast.net) for information.

### ICELANDICS ONLINE

As Bert Bates reports in the Regional Club Updates in this issue, Kraftur member Kathy Sierra's December promotional video, “The True Icelandic Horse,” amassed over 100,000 views in less than a month. See: <https://vimeo.com/113323901>, or search on “Serious Pony” for this and other videos of interest to Icelandic horse owners and riders.

Trainer Guðmar Pétursson has also been active posting videos on the Internet. See “A drill team practice in Fakasel” on YouTube to learn how to prepare for a drill team performance.



Kari Pietsch-Wangard (F2) riding Sikill frá Sperðli at the 2009 World Championships. Photo by Stu Wangard.



Kelly Blough (tied T7) riding Sandur frá Syðri-Sandhólum.

Andrea Barber recently began posting some older videos on YouTube, including a 2000 clinic with Icelandic horse trainer Dani Gehmacher of Wiesenhof, Germany. Search on “Sand Meadow Farm.”

And Icelandic horse enthusiast Stan Hirson has created a new platform for his many informative and entertaining Icelandic horse videos, shot both in Iceland and the U.S. See “Life with Horses” at [www.lifewithhorses.com](http://www.lifewithhorses.com), where you can find a link to his amazingly popular “Super Tölt on an Icelandic Horse” from 2007. This 19-second clip has been viewed 1,222,946 times on YouTube.

If you’re excited about spreading

the news about the Icelandic horse in America via the Internet, please contact us. The Quarterly Committee is searching for an Internet correspondent—someone to write a regular column about resources on Icelandic horses that are available on the Internet. To volunteer, contact the editors at [quarterly@icelandics.org](mailto:quarterly@icelandics.org).

### ADVERTISERS WANTED

Like our color? If so, please help support the *Quarterly* by placing an advertisement. The *Quarterly* is sent to all USIHC members, either electronically or in print. We have a paid print circulation of over 450 copies, with a total print run of 650 copies. All magazines end up in the hands of interested readers. In addition, all our issues appear in full on the USIHC website where they can be downloaded.

Have you checked our ad prices? See [http://www.icelandics.org/quarterly.php#ad\\_rates](http://www.icelandics.org/quarterly.php#ad_rates). We think you’ll find them competitive. Our prices are about half what other Icelandic horse publications charge, and ads for USIHC-sanctioned events are free. Contact us at [quarterly@icelandics.org](mailto:quarterly@icelandics.org).

### BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Minutes of the USIHC Board of Directors’ meetings held in November and December, along with the approved 2015 budget, are available on the USIHC website ([www.icelandics.org](http://www.icelandics.org)) under The Congress, Board of Directors. In addition



Mitch Martin (T5 and V3) riding Jökull frá Austvaðsholti 1.

to topics already reported on in this section, here are some highlights:

Ásta Covert resigned from the Board effective January 1; Will Covert was selected to fill Ásta’s seat. Ásta remains the USIHC Registrar.

Anita Sepko was approved as new chair of the Regional Club Committee, replacing Martina Gates.

Treasurer Kari Pietsch-Wangard presented the 2014 Income and Expense Report at the December meeting. In 2014, the USIHC showed a net loss of \$4,885. Total membership dues were \$17,518. Income from the Registry was \$12,709. The Farm Listing, Website advertising, and Quarterly advertising brought in an additional \$8,808.

The Education Committee is working on formatting and publishing the Riding Badge textbook, in addition to creating



Olivia Rasmussen (T6) riding Festi frá Kastalabrekku. Photo by Heidi Benson.



Tammy Martin (tied T7) riding Kvintett fra Torfunesi. Photo by Martina Gates.

the new yearly Sport Judges Seminars.

The Breeding Committee is discussing a proposal regarding procedures for registering stillborn foals into WorldFengur. As Andrea Barber reported, a USIHC member sent information to registrar Ásta Covert on a stillborn foal to be entered into WorldFengur. Until then, the USIHC registry had never recorded stillbirths. Yet, as the member pointed out, "stillborn" is an option in the "fate" field of WorldFengur, and there are currently 170 horses listed that way from Germany, Denmark, France, Iceland, and Norway. The Breeding Committee discussed the topic at length and presented a proposal to the board. The board decided to allow the registration of stillborn foals. Ásta Covert, Anne Elwell, and Andrea will work on revising the U.S. registry rules, and associated forms, as needed. Registration of stillbirths will be voluntary. If the foal is registered, the same DNA testing as for live foals will be required. The fee structure will also be the same, so as to cover registry time and operating costs. The owner may request a registration certificate for the foal, which shall include designating the foal as "stillborn."

The Breeding Committee is also proceeding with the effort to create a standard blood profile for the Icelandic horse. This project, for which \$14,000 is budgeted in 2015, is a collaboration with Cornell University, which is currently preparing a proposal to present to the USIHC board.



Lucy Nold (T3 and V2) riding Andri frá Sólbrekku. Photo by Sarah Ziller.



## WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

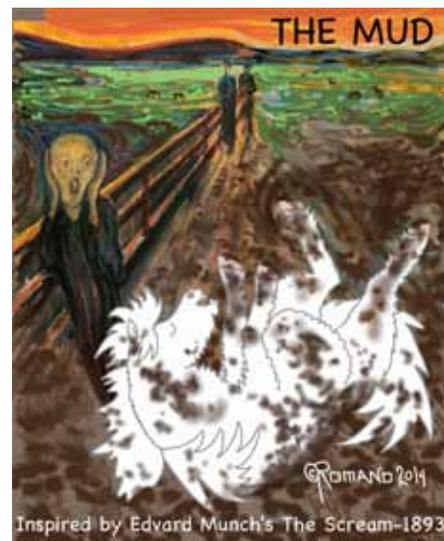
The 2015 Icelandic Horse World Championships will be held in Herning, Denmark, on August 3-9. The organizing committee, from the six Nordic Icelandic Horse Associations, is currently recruiting and training volunteers. Other plans include an expanded Breeders Café, with possibilities for exhibition, stands, and presentations, and an improved version of the stud farm presentation. See [vm2015.com](http://vm2015.com) for more information. Tryouts for the U.S. team will be held in May. Contact the U.S. Sport Leader, Will Covert, at [sport@icelandics.org](mailto:sport@icelandics.org).

## FEIF QUESTIONNAIRE

Every year FEIF asks all member countries to complete a questionnaire about the Icelandic horse world in their country. In 2014, the total number of Icelandic horses in the world (registered in WorldFengur) decreased by 2 percent to 255,712, while the number of members of our association increased by 1 percent to 59,541. If Icelandic horses were only owned by members of our association, that would mean each member owns an average of 4.5 horses. Visit [www.feif.org](http://www.feif.org) for more facts and figures.

## TÖLT IN HARMONY

Denni Hauksson and Ása William were invited to give a presentation on Tölt in Harmony at the FEIF committee meetings, held in Malmö, Sweden, October



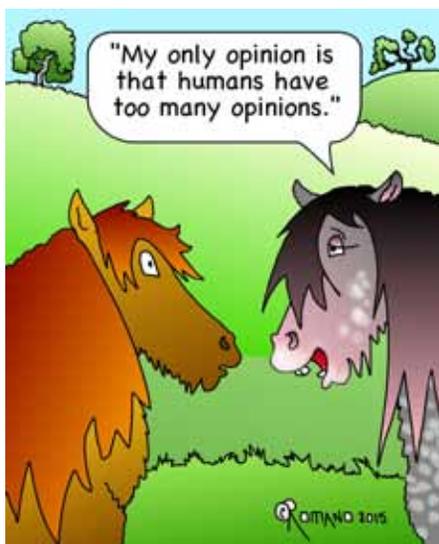
24-26. Tölt in Harmony, a form of training and competing in balance and in harmony with the educational level of the horse and rider, is based on the ideas of Reynir Aðalsteinsson. Read more about it on the Facebook page, "Tölt in Harmony" (and in the article in this issue of the *Quarterly*). The Tölt in Harmony development committee includes some of the most experienced judges, riders, and trainers in the world. A video from a competition in Iceland during Horse Expo 2014 can be watched here: <http://www.hestfrettir.is/tolt-in-harmony-video-fra-urslitum/>.

## EQUIPMENT MANUAL

A draft of the new FEIF Equipment Manual was shared at the FEIF committee meeting in October. The manual was prepared by Marlise Grimm (FEIF Director of Breeding), Doug Smith (FEIF Director of Sport), Johannes Hoyos (AT), Magnus Skulasson (SE), Mette Mannseth (IS), Rasmus Møller Jensen (DK), Sigríður Björnsdóttir (IS), Silke Feuchthofen (FEIF Director of Education), Sveinn Ragnarsson (IS), and Vicky Eggertson (DE).

## PORTED BITS

After reviewing the results of studies conducted in Iceland, the FEIF Sport and Breeding committees agreed during a joint session in Malmö to prohibit the use of Icelandic bits with ported mouths (0.5 cm and taller).



## FEIF YOUTH CAMP

The 2015 FEIF Youth Camp will be hosted by Germany and will take place in Berlar from June 28 to July 5 (see <http://www.reitschule.berger.de/>). FEIF Youth Camp brings young riders from different nationalities together. The camps are organized for youth aged 12-18 who share a passion for the Icelandic horse. Campers do not need to own an Icelandic horse, but should be interested in them and have riding knowledge. The activities at each camp are up to the host country to decide and can include riding, hiking, sight-seeing, etc. In 2015, the camp will have a circus theme. In addition to horse-related activities, campers will visit the famous Warendorf stud and the horse museum in Münster, spend a day with World Champion Icelandic riders Silke Feuchthofen and Jolly Schrenk, visit the theme park "Fort Fun" ([www.fortfun.de](http://www.fortfun.de)), and go down an iron mine.

For more details, contact the USIHC Youth committee at [youth@icelandics.org](mailto:youth@icelandics.org).

## LEISURE RIDING

The FEIF Leisure Committee met to review its 2014 survey on the characteristics of Icelandic pleasure horses, which garnered 3,065 responses. One surprising result is that half of the respondents found tölt ability less important than the calmness of the horse in general. It seems to be particularly important that the horse is not afraid of traffic. Another interesting fact

is that older riders seem to prefer smaller horses. Further work with the data was presented at the FEIF Delegates Assembly in February. The survey will be used to help the committee, in cooperation with university researchers, devise a test of the preferred qualities of a pleasure horse at any given level of its education.

## BREEDERS MEETING

The Second Open Breeders' Meeting was scheduled for January 17 in Copenhagen. It was organized in cooperation with the breeding committee of Dansk Islandshesteforening (DI). Over 60 breeding officials, representatives of FEIF member countries, judges, trainers, riders, and breeders from several countries attended the meeting.

Topics discussed included horse welfare, improving the breeding horse evaluation system, the responsibility of the trainer and owner, foal and young horse assessments, breeding goals, and avoiding potential problems of doping of men and horses.

## FIPO TIMER APP

The third FEIF App is available on the Apple App Store. Speakers at FIPO competitions can use this App to keep track of the time for the riders to present each section of all FIPO tests. The App takes the test, section, and number of riders and determines the time required. During the countdown the screen changes

colors and the familiar "FIPO Timer" tones are made to indicate the remaining time. As with all FEIF Apps, this App is available to everyone for free.

## VET CHECK FORMS

The FEIF VetCheck Group is reviewing the forms and procedures regarding mouth checks and checks on leg injuries during various events. The forms used by judges and ring stewards are being revised, including an improved system to score the severity of the wounds, to distinguish the character of the wound (old, scar, or fresh), and to mark in an easy way where the injury is located. The adapted forms will make it easier and more uniform to decide if the injuries are severe enough to stop a horse from competing or to disqualify the rider. The new forms were tested during winter events. Members of the group include Caroline van de Bunt, Claudia Glück-Ragnarsson, and Susanne Braun, all three active vets and FEIF International Sport Judges; the chair is Marko Mazeland.

## HARMONIOUS RIDING

In 2014, 78 riders were nominated for Good and Harmonious Riding. The German rider Cristina Daniele was nominated most: by nine international sport judges at four different WorldRanking events in Germany and at the mid-European championships in Switzerland.

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# REGIONAL CLUB UPDATES

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*There are 12 Regional Clubs affiliated with the U.S. Icelandic Horse Congress. To find the one nearest you, see the USIHC website at <http://www.icelandics.org/regionalclubs.php>. Contact information for each club can also be found there. The following clubs filed updates on their activities this quarter.*

## **AIHA (ALASKA)**

**BY FRAN BUNDTZEN**

The Alaskan Icelandic Horse Association had a busy summer of activities, large and small. Bill Burke came back to teach two clinics at Arctic Arrow Farm in Wasilla, AK, one in July and one in September. He also taught a clinic on the Kenai in September.

In August Arctic Arrow Farm hosted a Play Day, which included a flag race, barrel race, cone bending, beer tölt, ride-a-buck, and a trail course with prizes for everyone participating.

AIHA provided an Icelandic horse display at the Alaska State Fair, held in August at Palmer, AK. For four days, Icelandics



Above, Alaska Icelandic Horse Association members take part in a competitive trail ride. Below, the AIHA Play Day at Arctic Arrow Farm in Alaska included a flag race, barrel race, cone bending, ride-a-buck, a trail course, and the beer tölt, shown here, with prizes for everyone participating.

were on display in both the barn and the Equestrian Center, and AIHA members were on hand to answer questions about the breed. Thanks to Jeannette Willis

for organizing this event, and to Hjarta, Solfari, Drynur, Kappi, and Annall for being our Icelandic ambassadors.

Our club has been expanding in membership, and we now have some new youth members in our group. Some of our young members formed a 4-H group this summer, known as Tölt Alaska, with help from their parents and leader Janet Mulder, who is sharing her experiences with both Icelandics and 4-H. All the young riders are working together on the Icelandic Horse Riding Badge Program, and the group will be doing both horse and non-horse activities. Some of our youth members are also doing Pony Club with their Icelandics.

Five Icelandic horses participated in the Bald Mountain Butt Buster Competitive Trail Ride, which is a challenging two day event, involving climbing mountains and crossing the swift and turbulent Little Susitna River more than once. All the horses finished the ride, and some brought home ribbons and prizes.

Various members also got together to do camping trips with their horses, or to go on trail rides. It was a very fun summer with our favorite horses.

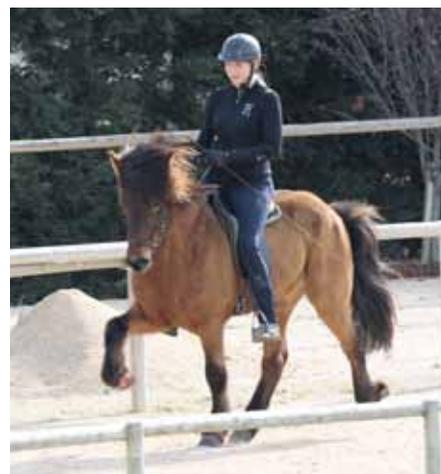


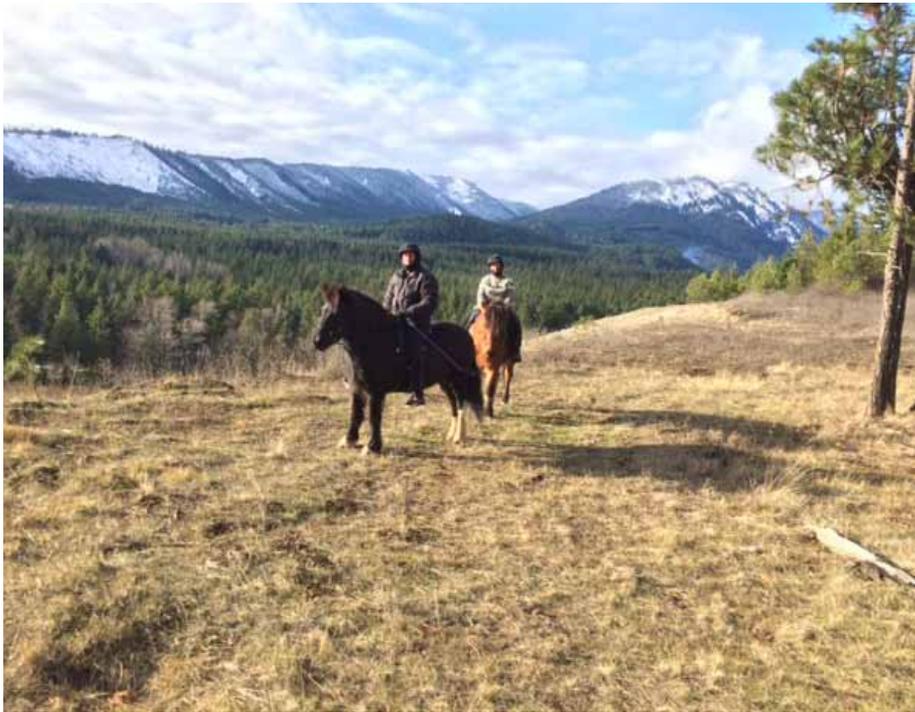


## CIA (SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA)

BY ÁSTA COVERT

We held the annual Olil Amble clinic in December at Flying C Ranch in Santa Ynez, CA. It was a great clinic like always, and everyone learned and had fun. We had six riders taking private lessons, so there was a lot of time for each rider to work with Olil. Shown here (clockwise from top) are Barbara Downs riding for Olil, Ayla Green, Doug Smith, Jeannene Heinrich, and Laura Benson. Photos by Ásta Covert.





On a frosty day in the mountains of Central Washington, CWIHC members Debby and Greg Dillard and their horses enjoy a trail ride.

## **CWIHC (CENTRAL WASHINGTON)**

*BY DEBBY DILLARD*

The Central Washington Icelandic Horse Club is located in Central Washington and encompasses members from the north and south central part of the state. The CWIHC is planning events for the Spring and Summer of 2015 to promote the Icelandic horse and to educate those new to the breed.

## **FIRC (MID-ATLANTIC STATES)**

*BY RICH MOORE*

The Frida Icelandic Riding Club had several events in the fall and looks forward to more activities in 2015. Events included a riding clinic in October, drill team practices, and a holiday party in December.

Suzi McGraw and Sandy Newkirk hosted a riding clinic with Steinar Sigurbjörnsson in Harpers Ferry, WV, on October 10-12, 2014. The 10 riders were Nancy Adler, Millie Angelino, Pat Carballo, Kathy Carpenter, Amanda Grace, Merja Kantola, Carrie Laurencot, Bob Shoemaker, Hedy Sladovich, and Joan Waller; they came

from Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. Suzi reported that the response by participants was enthusiastic and all were looking forward to more riding clinics with Steinar in 2015.

The FIRC drill team held regular practices in October and November. In November, a special session was organized for riders who were either new to the pattern the team had been using, or new to drill team riding and techniques. Rich Moore led this practice. Club members riding in the practices included Sverrir Bjartmarz, Antje Freygang, Mitch Martin, Rich Moore, Jacki Edens, Pat Carballo, Lesley Presnicak, and Sophia Koch.

On December 13, Barbara Sollner-Webb and Denis Webb hosted the annual club Christmas party at their home in Laurel, MD. Over 20 club members attended. Events included a chance to socialize, a bountiful spread of delicious food, a silent action that raised close to \$300 to help support the FIRC Sanctioned Show on May 16-17, a report on club activities during 2014 by club president Pat Moore, and the collection of dues for 2015. Everyone had a great time.

## **KRAFTUR (NORTHERN CALIFORNIA)**

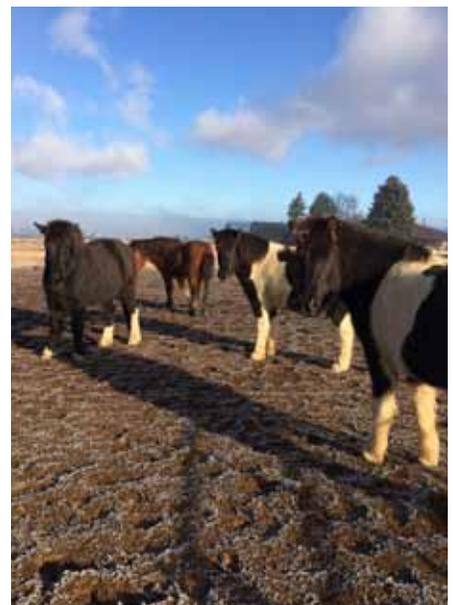
*BY BERT BATES*

Looking back over the various Kraftur events of 2014 the word “eclectic” kept coming to mind. As previously reported, Kraftur members continue to participate in USIHC sanctioned shows, attend Icelandic horse-specific clinics (led by Guðmar Pétursson, Steinar Sigurbjörnsson, and other luminaries), and get together for trail rides all around the Bay Area. Those are our staples. But Kraftur members are exploring a number of other activities:

*Gaeðingakeppni:* In February, Mountain Icelandic Farm (owned by Annette Coulon and Bruce Edwards), hosted a Gaeðingakeppni clinic taught by Sindri Sigurðsson and Friðdóra Friðríksdóttir.

*Show Preparation Clinics:* Several clinics focused on preparing for USIHC shows were held in 2014.

*Dressage:* In May, Jec Ballou rode Kathy Sierra’s horse Draumur in his first official dressage show and received an “exceptional” score of 71 percent. The last two USIHC shows hosted by Mountain Icelandic Farm have included dressage classes, and Kraftur members are plotting to attend more dressage shows in 2015.



Ready and willing for another trail ride in Central Washington. Photo by Debby Dillard.

*Summer Riding Camps:* In May and June, Heidi Benson hosted riding camps for beginning riders.

*Icelandic Trek:* In June, Kraftur members traveled to Iceland for a multi-day trek through the beautiful Icelandic countryside.

*Landsmót:* Between trekkers, the Youth Cup team, and enthusiasts, a record number of Kraftur members (over a dozen?), attended Landsmót in Iceland this summer.

*FEIF Youth Cup:* As previously reported, in July, several youth riders from Kraftur attended the Youth Cup at Holar in Iceland.

*Tölt in Harmony:* As previously reported, in August, Mountain Icelandic Farm hosted a *Tölt in Harmony* clinic. More *Tölt in Harmony* clinics are being planned for 2015; check [krafturclub.wordpress.com](http://krafturclub.wordpress.com) for details.



Photographer Jim Pollock spent Christmas morning with some of the Kraftur kids and their horses in Monte Sereno. Using a vintage camera, and developing the black-and-white film himself, Jim captured Gabrielle Pollock riding Gjálp frá Hólmahjáleigu, Jessica Blough riding Hugljúf frá Vatnsholti, and Jamie Blough riding Rán frá Hofi; Madeline Pollock was there as well, but without a horse because hers lost a shoe.



*Yoga for Riders:* In October and November, Mountain Icelandic Farm hosted two “Yoga for Riders” clinics taught by Jec Ballou. Yoga-ists included: Robynn Smith, Gabriele Meyer, Liz Riehl, Sharon Eckhart, Annette Coulon, and Leslie Johnson.

*Halloween:* During the extended Halloween season, Kraftur youth riders participated in a special Halloween ride.

*Introduce the Icelandic Horse Open House:* In November, Mountain Icelandic Farm hosted a well attended open house for folks new to the Icelandic horse. Several demos

were given, including a five-gait program ridden by Lucy Nold.

*Tack Swap:* In December, Kraftur held an official club meeting and added a tack swap to liven up the business portion of the meeting. Thanks to Gabriele Meyer for organizing this event.

*Videos:* In December, Kraftur member Kathy Sierra created a promotional video for the Icelandic horse that “went viral” in the world-wide Icelandic horse world. To date, this video has over 100,000 views. See: <https://vimeo.com/113323901>

*Holiday Parade:* A tradition with Kraftur, in early December, the Los Gatos branch of Kraftur hosted a youth sleepover, orchestrated Kraftur's successful, multiple horse/rider attendance in the Los Gatos Holiday Parade, and then hosted a post-parade club picnic. Many, many thanks to Laurie Prestine, Laurie Pollock, Colleen Monsef, and Kelly Blough for their hard work putting together this wonderful set of events!

2015 promises to be another fun-filled year for Kraftur. As of this writing we're planning to host a USIHC-sanctioned show on April 18-19. Please check [krafturclub.wordpress.com](http://krafturclub.wordpress.com) for late breaking news and updates.

## **NEIHC (NORTHEASTERN U.S.)**

*BY JESSICA HAYNSWORTH*

Last November, NEIHC members were very busy working hard to make sure that Icelandic horses were once again a memorable and exciting part of Equine Affaire in Springfield, MA. The Silver Maple Show Team brought their horses all the way from Tunbridge, VT to represent the breed in style. They trained all fall to perfect their drill for the evening Fantasia shows. Audiences were treated to an exciting drill, featuring light-up unicorn horns, dramatic capes, beautiful liberty tricks by Caeli Cavanagh and her horse, Soldís (see the article in Issue Four 2014 of the *Quarterly*), and music from the popular TV show *Game of Thrones* (a show which, fittingly, films many of its scenes in Iceland and has actually featured Icelandic horses). The drill, choreographed by Jana Meyer, was a huge success and really got the crowd going!

The Silver Maple Show Team also performed a breed demo during the day, to show off the great character and versatile gaits of our breed, and gave a talk in the Youth Pavilion to get young visitors excited about Icelandic horses. NEIHC members also manned a booth in the Breed Pavilion, which is an immense amount of work and very beneficial, as this is the area where people can come to learn about Icelandic horses throughout the weekend.

So many people worked so hard to make Equine Affaire happen; Kara Noble



Jec Ballou, standing, led Kraftur members in a "Yoga for Riders" clinic. From left to right, Annette Coulon, Liz Riehl, Sharon Eckhert, Robynn Smith, and Gabriele Meyer.

summed it up best on the NEIHC Facebook page: "A million thank yous to everyone who pulled together to make the NEIHC's representation at this year's Equine Affaire such a success! Extra special thanks to Jana Meyer, who worked incredibly hard to prepare another amazing performance for the Fantasia, on top of also organizing all of the arrangements for the club's booth

in the Breed Pavilion. What a superhero to get all of that together and to do all of it so well! Many thanks to the incredible drill team, who did such a wonderful job on the Fantasia show: Quinn Thomashow, Bailey Soderberg, Susan Sundstrom, Rebecca Hoyt, Susan Peters, Caeli Cavanagh, Em Potts, and Libby Chilinski joined Jana for a great performance. Drill team members



Not enough riders for a drill team? No problem, if the horses pony well. NEIHC members Hannah Huss and Nicki Esdorn are having fun teaching ponying to a three-year-old, using three "old hands." Photo by Erika Reptschik.



at the booth, including Óskadís, Goði, Líf, and Magni. Thank you too to the perpetually fabulous Amy Goddard and Cindy Wescott, and the NEIHC's Board for getting together all the necessary materials and making sure they were shipped to the right people and places so that they were there when they were needed."

On December 13, NEIHC members from Silver Maple Farm participated in the Wassail holiday parade in Woodstock, VT. The riders and horses looked beautiful and had a lot of fun, too.

The NEIHC has many events planned for the coming season:

On March 7, we hope that members will join us for our annual Thorrablot celebration and NEIHC Annual Meeting. This year, these events will take place at the home of NEIHC member Charlotte Kooyman, in Claverack, NY. Our club's potluck Thorrablot party is always a fun one, and we look forward to another night of friends, food, singing, dancing, and of course, our annual tack sale.

On June 6, the NEIHC's annual Games Day will be held at West Wind Farm in Delhi, NY—check the NEIHC

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Jana Meyer led the NEIHC's appearance at Equine Affaire in Massachusetts; here she presents a Breed Demo, with assistance from her daughter, Finja Meyer Hoyt. Photo by Heleen Heyning.

were joined by Isabelle Maranda from Vermont Icelandic Horse Farm to put on a wonderful breed demonstration on Sunday morning. Thanks also to the great team who brought materials, set everything up, staffed the booth and helped introduce loads of people to Icelandic horses and the club at the Breed Pavilion. Some people just showed up and pitched in, so there may be a few names missing here (if anyone can help give credit where it is due, please do!), but thanks are definitely due to Leah Greenberg, Leslie Chambers, Beth Worden, Heleen Heyning, Margot Apple, Terry Ciofredi, Kara Noble, and of course Jana and the entire terrific crew from Silver Maple Icelandic Horse Farm. And, of course, extra special thanks to the horses who spent time being such great ambassadors for the breed



The Silver Maple Show Team rode in both the evening Fantasia and a daytime breed demo at Equine Affaire. Here rider Susan Peters gives autographs to the fans. Photo by Jana Meyer.



The Silver Maple Show Team wowed the crowd at Equine Affaire in Massachusetts, with a drill team of sparkly unicorns and cloak-draped elves. Photo by Jana Meyer.

website for details! This event was hugely successful last year, and we hope to have another day of fun with great horses and great friends.

The NEIHC Open, our club's annual sanctioned competition, will be held on July 11-12 this year at Thor Icelandics in Claverack, NY. In the past we've held this event

in September, but the results of an NEIHC members' survey prompted the change to a summer show. This way, youth riders will not have to juggle training with school, and horses will have more energy, because they won't be growing their winter coats. Hulda Geirsdóttir will return as our judge, and there will be a pre-show clinic with Steinar Sigurbjörnsson.

We are also excited to announce a Tölt in Harmony clinic with Trausti Þór Guðmundsson on September 18-20 at Thor Icelandics in Claverack, NY. (See the article on a similar clinic with Trausti in this issue of the *Quarterly*.) Tölt in Harmony is an exciting new form of competition for Icelandic horses that is becoming popular in Iceland and Europe. It will be fun to give NEIHC riders a chance to try this fun event, and following the clinic there will be an informal mini competition.



Members of the Silver Maple Show Team also gave a daytime demo at Equine Affaire. Left to right, Bailey Soderbergh, Quinn Thomashow, Isabelle Maranda, and Caeli Cavanagh. Photo by Jana Meyer.

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## OVIHC (OHIO VALLEY)

BY JULI COLE

As reported in Issue Four 2014 of the *Quarterly*, the Ohio Valley Regional Club held a successful Young Horse Evaluation and clinic with Barbara Frische at the Simmons Equestrian Center in Negley, OH, on October 19. The participants are planning for a similar event with Barbara in 2015. Also on the schedule are clinics with other trainers/instructors, trail rides, schooling shows, and much more. Membership in the OVIHC is free to any current USIHC member. Contact Juli Cole (juli2875@yahoo.com or 724-667-4184) for information.

## ST SKUTLA (CENTRAL & WESTERN NEW YORK)

BY SUSAN VERBERG

Greni from Blasted Rock and I participated in a few events this year. Not sure if they are noteworthy, but at least we got out—and we even had some success! We did two hunter paces this year, both at Big Easy Stables in Dryden, NY. The first one (in July) was quite a learning experience, and we must have been paying attention, because at the second one (in August) we placed third!

In September Greni and I participated in the Walk-Trot division of the Kindergarten Classic at our local Carriage

House Saddlery and placed second out of seven in the Trail Trial and the Command classes. My son Simon and I dressed up for the Costume Class as Forest Fairies, with Greni and Simon's Shetland, Snowflake, as our mounts.

Finally, Simon and I rode Greni at the Holiday Musical Movement held by Carriage House Saddlery on December 7. I did a pattern on "Getting Ready for Christmas Day" by Paul Simon, and I leadlined Simon on "Jingle Bells," while Simon demonstrated going-around-the-world and other balance exercises we've worked on over the past year—all while shaking his jingle bells in time to the music.



St Skutla Club member Simon Verberg demonstrates balance exercises while his mother, Susan Verberg, leads Greni from Blasted Rock at a Holiday Musical Movement event held by Carriage House Saddlery in December.

# WINTERHORSE SWEEPS THE BREEDING AWARDS

**C**ongratulations to Dan and Barb Riva of Winterhorse Park in Eagle, WI, whose horses have won both breeding awards offered by the USIHC: the Anne Elwell Breeding Award and the Caryn Cantella Breeding Award.

Piltur from Winterhorse Park (US2008103864) is the 2014 winner of the Anne Elwell Award. This award is given each year to the U.S.-bred horse that scores highest at a FEIF-recognized breeding evaluation. The award is named for Anne Elwell, a founding member of the USIHC and its first Breeding Leader. To be eligible, the horse must have been born in the U.S. and be registered with a FEIF registry. It must have been fully evaluated—for both conformation and ridden abilities—in the calendar year the award represents. The breeder must be a current member in good standing of a FEIF-recognized breed association (such as the USIHC).

Pipar from Winterhorse Park (US2014104926) is the 2014 winner of the new Caryn Cantella Award. This award goes to the highest assessed U.S.-bred young horse. The award is named for Caryn Cantella, another founding USIHC member and its first Registrar. To qualify for this award, a young horse must have been born in the U.S. and be registered (by the close of the calendar year the award represents) with a FEIF registry. It must have been evaluated under the FEIF General Rules for Young Horse and Foal Assessments, and its breeder must be a current member in good standing of a FEIF-recognized breed association.

USIHC Breeding Leader Andrea Barber asked Barb Riva to comment on the Winterhorse Park breeding philosophy that led to winning both 2014 awards.

*For more information on Winterhorse Park Icelandic Horse Farm in Eagle, WI, see [www.winterhorse.com](http://www.winterhorse.com) or contact Barb and Dan Riva at [winterhorse@centurytel.net](mailto:winterhorse@centurytel.net) (phone 262-594-5152).*



The 2014 Caryn Cantella award winner: Pipar from Winterhorse Park, with his dam Pólstjarna from Circle City. Photo by Barb Riva.

## THE WINTERHORSE WAY

BY BARB RIVA

**E**ach of these breedings stem from very different beginnings. Piltur was a little easier in the planning. He has a number of full siblings, with the dam being Perla frá Stóru-Ásgeirsá (US93201714) and the sire Fjalar frá Bjargshóli (US90101810). All of these offspring start out with fairly high young horse evaluations scores and reach first prize conformation scores as they mature. Piltur's full sister, and our first breeding of this combination, Pia from Winterhorse (US2003202641) is first prize. The other offspring are younger and have all scored favorably through the years so far.

Unlike Pia, who took the black color of Fjalar, Piltur is a flashy chestnut pinto. He continued to mature to have quite the presence as a young stallion. Both his full evaluations went well, considering the fact

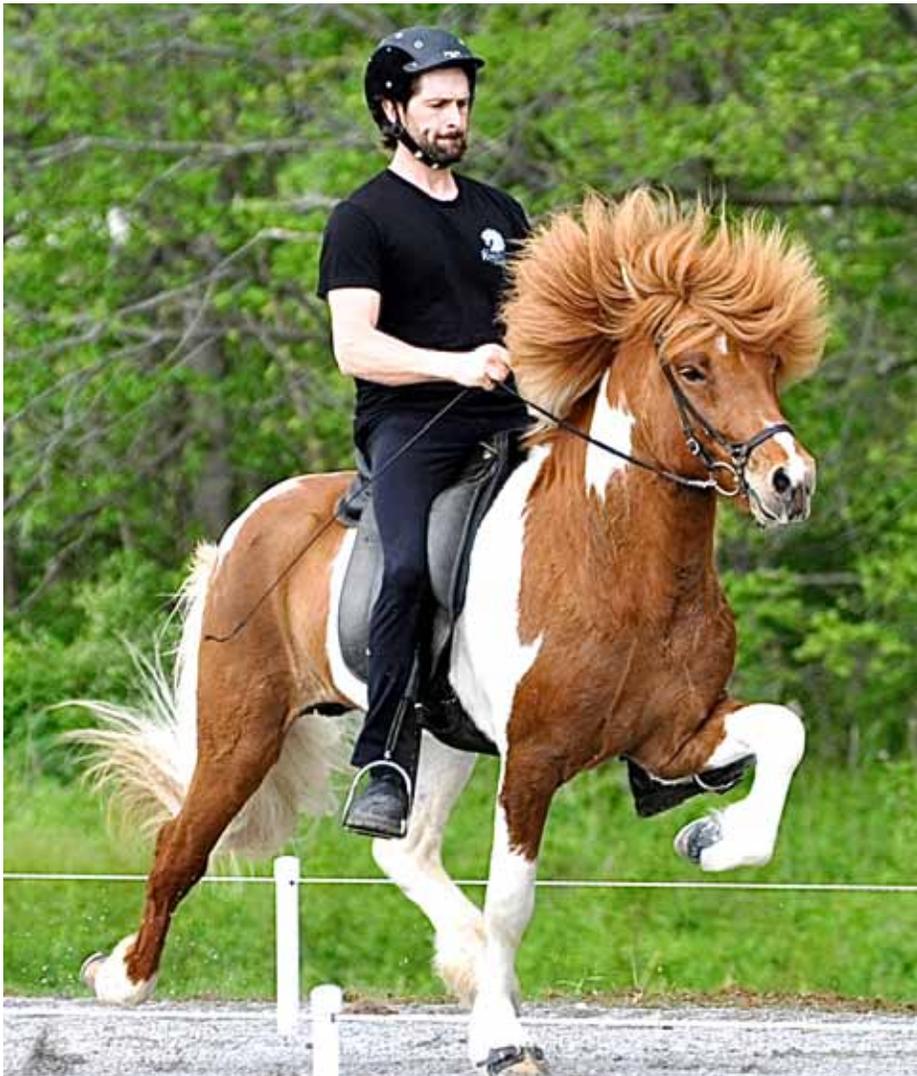
that his training is sporadic. We prefer to have our horses trained here at our farm, for various reasons, and look for suitable trainers from other countries who have experience with the breed and the ability to train for evaluations. It can make it more difficult for our horses to adjust to different trainers' skills, along with the breaks in between visiting trainers. Luckily, we have a few good riders working for us who can continue the work with them.

Piltur's first full evaluation as a five-year-old, in 2013, went very well. He scored 8.24 in conformation and 7.76 for gaits, giving him a total score of 7.95. He qualified to attend the World Championships that year as a five-year-old breeding horse representing the United States. Dan and I felt that he was just too young to make that trip to Europe, and we really wanted

to try to continue his training for a possible first prize score. A year later, in May 2014, we took him to Kentucky for his next full evaluation. His score for conformation went up to 8.37. That gave him the highest conformation score of domestic-bred stallions in the U.S. Unfortunately, his gait score went down to 7.47, for a total score of 7.83. Understandably, his mind was not on the task at hand. From his perspective, coming to a new farm with all those wonderful new mares, made him think of things that would be so much more fun than performing on that straight track over and over again. Yes, we were disappointed. We had hoped to go home and lighten up on his training and let him start breeding. Instead, maybe 2015 will be his year to shine and become first prize. We'll be having a Breeding Horse Evaluation here at Winterhorse Park on May 27-28, with a young horse evaluation to follow on May 29 and a sport competition

on the weekend, May 30-31.

Pipar had quite a different beginning. Over the years that we have been breeding Icelandics, we feel that our decisions have been very conservative. We would breed only to our evaluated mares and, once in a great while, breed to a stallion other than Fjalar. Dan and I took what felt like a bit of a risk on this breeding. A good friend of ours, Jeanne Martenet of Circle City Icelandics in Indiana, bred her best riding mare, Bylgja frá Þverá (US1996202169) to Pegasus frá Skyggni (US1997103226). I have always loved Pegasus, but didn't feel I had a mare that would match well with him. Jeanne brought the foal of this breeding, Pólstjarna from Circle City (US2008203888) to a young horse assessment held here at Winterhorse Park in 2009. As I remember, Pólstjarna's conformation as a foal was not that great, but her gait potential and spirit were on the high end.



The 2014 Anne Elwell Award winner: Pipar from Winterhorse Park, shown by Guðmar Pétursson. Photo by Shaila Ann Sigsgaard.

The international breeding horse judge, Barbara Frische, suggested that we purchase Pólstjarna for future breeding to Fjalar. Jeanne was thrilled to have that future plan for her, so we made the purchase and Pólstjarna grew and matured here for the next three years. My husband, Dan, was skeptical about the breeding, but I had confidence that Fjalar would work his magic for the conformation of the planned foal. We had Pólstjarna trained as a four-year-old and tried to get that breeding in as soon as possible, since Fjalar was getting up in years. She was a tough little mare, and it was amazing to see how that little pipsqueak terrorized Fjalar to no end. We planned for the breeding the next spring, when Pólstjarna would be five and Fjalar the ripe old age of 23. After a few months of continued terror with every fleeting glance from him, she finally let Fjalar look at her. From there the old stud, with all his experience and knowledge of pasture breeding in the good old motherland of Iceland, convinced her it was a good idea.

Dan was still apprehensive and continued to remind me that we may have made a mistake. One very early morning in June 2014, after a particularly bad thunderstorm, I slipped on my flipflops and went out to check on the herds—especially on Pólstjarna, who had looked very close to foaling the evening before. It was still a little dark and foggy, and I found her standing over a dark clump of what looked to be mud or manure in tall grass. As I approached, feeling that cold slop running between my toes, the dark clump started to move. A beautiful black foal stood up and stretched. However, it was not a stretch but this wonderfully high-set, long neck that stayed in that upright position.

Pipar was named, of course, for his black color, but most of all for his personality. He seemed to seek out new experiences with inquisitive confidence. We try not to touch our foals, letting them learn from the broodmare herd first, but there was always something special about Pipar from the day he was born. He seems to experience life to the fullest, enjoying every new thing he encounters. A real Pepper Pot. Sadly, Jeanne Martenet passed away last year before Pipar was born. I know she's looking down at him, maybe putting a bit of wind under those tiny hooves! She would be proud. I can hear her say in that southern accent of hers, "I told ya, Barb, I told ya! This was going to be a good one."

## TOP 10 YOUNG HORSE EVALUATION RESULTS – 2014

### 1. Pipar from Winterhorse Park US2014104926

Color: Black no markings  
Breeder: Barb & Dan Riva  
Owner: Barb & Dan Riva  
F: Fjalar frá Bjargshóli  
Ff: Glaður frá Sauðárkróki  
Fm: Fenja frá Stóra-Hofi  
M: Pólstjarna from Circle City Icelandics  
Mf: Pegasus frá Skyggni  
Mm: Bylgja frá Þverá  
Conformation: 81.65  
Character: 91.00  
Gaits & Movement: 75.16  
Overall: 80.28

### 2. Pundur from Winterhorse Park US2012104880

Color: Black no markings  
Breeder: Barb & Dan Riva  
Owner: Barb & Dan Riva  
F: Fjalar frá Bjargshóli  
Ff: Glaður frá Sauðárkróki  
Fm: Fenja frá Stóra-Hofi  
M: Thokadis from Winterhorse Park  
Mf: Þröstur frá Innri-Skeljabrekku  
Mm: Mær frá Grafarkoti  
Conformation: 86.33  
Character: 89.50  
Gaits & Movement: 72.31  
Overall: 79.95

### 3. Plúton from Winterhorse Park US2014104904

Color: Chestnut Pinto  
Breeder: Barb & Dan Riva  
Owner: Barb & Dan Riva  
F: Fjalar frá Bjargshóli  
Ff: Glaður frá Sauðárkróki  
Fm: Fenja frá Stóra-Hofi  
M: Perla frá Stóru-Ásgeirsá  
Mf: Þorri frá Þúfu í Landeyjum  
Mm: Snör frá Stóru-Ásgeirsá  
Conformation: 84.95  
Character: 91.00  
Gaits & Movement: 69.39  
Overall: 78.38

### 4. Glóra frá Sjóvarborg IS2011257248

Color: Blue dun pinto  
Breeder: Karen Heba Jónsdóttir  
Owner: Anna Soffía Ryan  
F: Hvítserkur frá Sauðárkróki  
Ff: Álfur frá Selfossi

Fm: Kná frá Varmalæk  
M: Glóð frá Sjóvarborg  
Mf: Reykur frá Hemlu II  
Mm: Hulda frá Hemlu I  
Conformation: 80.90  
Character: 88.00  
Gaits & Movement: 72.25  
Overall: 78.00

### 5. Venus from Sand Meadow US2014204898

Color: Light bay with star  
Breeder: Andrea & Steven Barber  
Owner: Andrea & Steven Barber  
F: Hergill frá Oddhóli  
Ff: Logi frá Skarði  
Fm: Hekla frá Oddhóli  
M: Sædis frá Melabergi  
Mf: Roði frá Múla  
Mm: Sveifla frá Bakka  
Conformation: 82.63  
Character: 89.50  
Gaits & Movement: 70.56  
Overall: 77.97

### 6. Lína from Beat N' Branch US20111204623

Color: Bay no markings  
Breeder: Ronald & Sherry Hoover  
Owner: Ronald & Sherry Hoover  
F: Pegasus frá Skyggni  
Ff: Hrafn frá Holtsmúla  
Fm: Gletta frá Kolsholtshelli  
M: Stella Luna from Jont Creek  
Mf: Kjarnar frá Kjarnholtum I  
Mm: Duna from Saga California  
Conformation: 74.80  
Character: 91.00  
Gaits & Movement: 74.35  
Overall: 77.82

### 7. Kvika from Four Winds Farm US2010204585

Color: Brown no markings  
Breeder: Lori Leo  
Owner: Ronald & Sherry Hoover  
F: Þóroddur frá Þóroddsstöðum  
Ff: Oddur frá Selfossi  
Fm: Hlökk frá Laugarvatni  
M: Kamilla frá Efri-Rauðalæk  
Mf: Markús frá Langholtsparti  
Mm: Drottning frá Efri-Rauðalæk  
Conformation: 74.04  
Character: 88.00  
Gaits & Movement: 73.46  
Overall: 76.54

### 8. Prins from Winterhorse Park US2013104887

Color: Black no markings  
Breeder: Barb & Dan Riva  
Owner: Barb & Dan Riva  
F: Fjalar frá Bjargshóli  
Ff: Glaður frá Sauðárkróki  
Fm: Fenja frá Stóra-Hofi  
M: Perla frá Stóru-Ásgeirsá  
Mf: Þorri frá Þúfu í Landeyjum  
Mm: Snör frá Stóru-Ásgeirsá  
Conformation: 84.25  
Character: 88.00  
Gaits & Movement: 66.29  
Overall: 76.02

### 9. Hösvir from Meant To Be Farm US2014104896

Color: Grey, born chestnut with star  
Breeder: Juli Cole  
Owner: Juli Cole  
F: Kembangur from Azur  
Ff: Þröstur frá Innri-Skeljabrekku  
Fm: Hryðja frá Strandarhöfði  
M: Hryðja frá Strandarhöfði  
Mf: Adam frá Ásmundarstöðum  
Mm: Muska frá Strandarhöfði  
Conformation: 73.14  
Character: 89.50  
Gaits & Movement: 64.90  
Overall: 72.29

### 10. Sæla from Beat N' Branch US2012204742

Color: Grey, born red dun/bay dun no markings  
Breeder: Ronald & Sherry Hoover  
Owner: Ronald & Sherry Hoover  
F: Glæsir from Beat N' Branch  
Ff: Þröstur frá Innri-Skeljabrekku  
Fm: Stella Luna from Jont Creek  
M: Gæfa frá Hafsteinsstöðum  
Mf: Ófeigur frá Flugumýri  
Mm: Brynhildur frá Hólum  
Conformation: 76.09  
Character: 77.33  
Gaits & Movement: 65.40  
Overall: 70.99

# TRAUSTI TEACHES US TO DANCE

BY HELGA THORDARSON

The Tölt in Harmony philosophy came to California in November, when ten riders enjoyed a clinic with Trausti Þór Guðmundsson, a master riding instructor on his first teaching trip to North America. The clinic was hosted by Kimberly Hart at Sunland Ranch in Encinitas, CA.

Trausti maintains a breeding and training farm in Kirkjuferjuhjáleiga, Iceland. He also runs a busy international riding school and travels regularly to Sweden, Norway, Germany, and elsewhere to teach pupils to ride “harmoniously and beautifully.” A fiercely curious individual, Trausti also ventures to far-flung places to explore foreign equestrian traditions. He rides under instructors for other breeds and disciplines in pursuit of new ideas and techniques to integrate into his approach.

Trausti is one of the developers of the new Tölt in Harmony approach. He believes that Tölt in Harmony has much to offer, as it places clear communication and the well being of the horse above other considerations. He is eager to share the concept and hopes to see Tölt in Harmony’s positive influence spread to both Icelandic competitions and pleasure



Trausti with Kimberly Hart on Rauði. The clinic was held at Kimberly’s Sunland Ranch in November. Photo by Ellyn Norris.

riding around the world.

This approach to riding Icelandic horses—which is quickly gaining popularity in Iceland and Europe—has hardly arrived on our coast, so there was much anticipation and curiosity about what we would learn at this inaugural U.S. clinic by a master Tölt in Harmony instructor.

## NO ELEVATOR

The group gathered at Sunland Ranch, under palm trees in balmy November weather, found Trausti to be engaging,

warm, encouraging, outspoken, and hilarious. His enthusiasm and devotion to the horses’ well-being and spirit were instantly apparent and contagious. Because the clinic included novice and intermediate riders, as well as horses at different levels of training, Trausti explained that we would not “rush” into Tölt in Harmony routines or do a Tölt in Harmony riding test. We weren’t ready, and Trausti refused to skip steps, as this runs counter to the very core of his philosophy: “There



“Trausti likes this picture,” Helga notes, “because Eyvindur and I look focused and studious. Eyvindur’s carriage looks good, too. He’s round and ‘leading with his forehead.’ Trausti put this photo up as his Facebook banner picture after the clinic.” Photo by Ellyn Norris.

is no elevator to expertise; you have to take the stairs!”

Over the two days of intensive riding sessions that followed, we did, indeed, *take the stairs*. Trausti provided a splendid introduction to the basic building blocks of horse and rider communication—elements that form the foundation for everything that later flows into Tölt in Harmony.

Trausti also threw down this challenge at the start of the clinic: He would return to California to provide a true Tölt in Harmony clinic *only* if we proved to be eager pupils with the “hunger” to learn and improve. Trausti made it clear that he simply isn’t interested in teaching students who “don’t want to work hard and do the homework.” (We got the message: *The game was on!*)

### WHAT IS TÖLT IN HARMONY?

Tölt in Harmony is much more than a new mode of Icelandic horse competition. Per Trausti, it is a “philosophy,” an outlook, a way of being. Tölt in Harmony puts the relationship with the horse at the center of life and informs everything we do—from greeting the horse in the morning to thanking him for a beautiful ride at the close of the day. Trausti teaches that this connection, and the communication that flows from it, is the key to everything—it’s “where the magic happens.”

The goal of Tölt in Harmony, then, is not to excel at a new type of competition, but rather to seek and practice a beautiful and harmonious way of riding. Tölt in Harmony develops and perfects the collaboration between horse and rider, so that aids are invisible and the “conversation” between horse and rider remains hidden and altogether private. Patient, stepwise work over a long time is required to develop a horse that is engaged, balanced, moving with even tempo and rhythm, and able to use all his strength to do what the rider asks. The aim of Tölt in Harmony is very ambitious, in fact: It is “full understanding, where rider and horse look as one.”

Trausti began with an introductory lecture to the group, explaining the powerful influence that Portuguese classical riding master Nuño Oliveira has had on his thinking. Trausti’s view is continually evolving as he integrates new ideas into his thinking. He outlined his current view of the classical training stages that form



Trausti Pór Guðmundsson teaches the basics of Tölt in Harmony to Susanne Hoover (left) and Dionne Rubio at the clinic at Sunland Ranch in Encinitas, CA. Photo by Ellyn Norris.

the basis of Tölt in Harmony:

**Ease:** The horse is unafraid and shows basic respect.

**Rhythm and beat:** The horse has “decided” to be a riding horse and collaborate with his rider. He can be engaged in a working mode, with regularity and tempo.

**Forwardness/Contact:** Forwardness must come before contact. One cannot achieve rein contact until the horse is moving forward and the energy is “flowing into your hands.”

**Impulsion:** Trausti defines this as “bounce or swing,” or engaged energy coming from the horse’s hind-end.

**Straightness:** evenness.

**Flexibility:** suppleness, lack of stiffness and tension.

**Collection:** engagement, lightness, and balance.

A slow progression through these stages ultimately results in an “educated horse.” And Tölt in Harmony requires a very well-educated horse, as the circular and figure-eight patterns are ridden without walls or rails: The horse must carry himself in a balanced frame and be in perfect communication with the rider.

### DO SIMPLE THINGS WELL

After the theory session, Trausti began with individual lessons. He observed each rider and rode each horse. At the end of each lesson, Trausti offered his honest assessment of the partnership and skill level of horse and rider. He warned us not to be impatient, stating that we should expect to practice everything we learn “at least 1,833 times.” With characteristic intensity, Trausti offered this guiding

principle: “Do simple things well and the difficult things will follow!”

To this end, he had us practice proper whole and half halts, use of calves and thighs as invisible aids, and “canceling” a departure to walk if the horse fails to yield. He encouraged us to ride actively, with mindful awareness of each micro-component of movement and communication. He emphasized the importance of doing extensive work at the walk and ensuring correct transitions, circles, and proper “frames” for the horse.



For Trausti, the phrase that best captures the connection between a horse and rider is this: “Contact established. Both parties interested.” Photo by Sara Dögg Traustadóttir.

We focused on asking our horses to yield softly and to carry themselves with pride. Meanwhile, Trausti took photos with the iPad that was always with him. In the arena (during sessions), he shared before and after pictures showing our changing seats and how the horses were beginning to come into better frames. This was instructive and extremely motivating. In some cases, seeing the transformation of a hollow-backed horse (“He’s moving like a banana!”) into a rounder frame brought riders to cheers and tears of joy.

Trausti used memorable phrases to capture his concept of “doing simple things well.” Some favorites from the clinic:

“A circle is not a circle unless it is a circle!”

“Never ride wrongly through a corner!”

“The rider should have immobile hands and mobile fingers! Close your hands during each transition, then open them.”

“If the horse does not yield, your hands should be like oak. When the horse yields, your hands become like butter.” We practiced this with walk/halt and walk/tölt transitions. Trausti explained that the horse must “find the release himself” by lowering the head. The rider’s hands must be steady, “still,” and ready to receive the horse’s yield. We must not be caught unawares and pull back on the reins at that moment, as this negates the perceived release for the horse and renders the exercise counterproductive. (I found this concept to be similar to Eyjólfur (Jolli) Ísólfsson’s concept of helping the horse find its “comfort zone.”)

### IT’S A PRIVATE CONVERSATION

Trausti continually called out riders for clumsy over-cueing and obvious aids. He counseled that cues must be subtle and graduated, otherwise the rider is “always shouting” at the horse. He sees too many riders “always clucking and tapping away with the heels,” which encourages the horse to tune out and disengage. He instructed: “First use the seat to cue. If the horse does not respond, use the calf. And then use Walter, if you need him!” Walter is the balanced Walter Feldman whip, which Trausti recommends. We had many laughs through the clinic, because he



Under Trausti’s tutelage, riders Rand Christensen and Jason Christensen worked on asking their horses to yield softly and carry themselves with pride. Photo by Elynn Norris.

refers to any whip as “Walter,” as in “You need your Walter! Use your Walter, now!”

Trausti directed us to control the direction of the horse primarily with our seat and legs, with minimal rein cueing. Along the same lines, he instructed



Helga and Eyvindur frá Oddhóli establishing contact. Photo by Elynn Norris.

us to “use no heels. Use calves only to cue.” When we failed miserably at attempts to leave our heels out of the equation, Trausti admonished us: “People, ride as if you have no feet!” All ten students struggled with this, and riders from Western riding backgrounds had particular difficulty. We were humbled, and promised Trausti that we would practice “riding with no feet” at least 1,833 times.

### TRAUSTI’S PHILOSOPHY

Trausti emphasized the importance of keeping our horses interested, curious, and “sometimes a little bit surprised.” The rider’s job is to create an “atmosphere” that stimulates and engages the horse in the partnership. For Trausti, the phrase that best captures the mutuality and lively connection needed between a horse and rider is this: “Contact established. Both parties interested.”

He encouraged us to “Try things! Be curious and inspired because riding is only 10 percent technique and 90 percent heart and feeling.” Trausti is a big believer in using music and recommends it to enhance the “feeling” part of riding. He believes that music can awaken and “surprise” both horse and rider—helping them discover new ways of “working together from the heart.” Music provides us with the “patience we need to get a good result.” Trausti also believes that music encourages us “not to think too much” and thereby helps riders from becoming too cerebral about their horsemanship.

## IT'S NOT ABOUT RIDING IN CIRCLES

Learning to ride harmoniously and classically, with invisible aids, requires immense patience, Trausti said, and Tölt in Harmony, like all good horsemanship, is necessarily a “life-long journey.”

At the close of the clinic, Trausti wrote a summary for each student that could be accessed at his riding school website, via a password. These individual assessments offered a brief training plan to help horse and rider improve and move to the next step. They were concise and helpful.

Trausti also shared observations on our group as a whole. He noted that our horses needed to be “more forward and more energetic.” He advised us to work in open spaces, in new areas, and on the trail to make the work stimulating and fun for the horse. He noted that training can occur on every ride, and that riding “in nature” more easily taps into a horse’s innate spirit and natural forwardness. The rider needs that reserve of energy available, such that the horse “wants to go a little faster than the rein contact allows—this is how you fill your hands with power.” Without that forwardness, Trausti says, “your hands are empty.”

He re-iterated that Tölt in Harmony is not an endpoint, but rather “a lifestyle, a way of being that you choose for yourself and your horse.” Tölt in Harmony concepts and skills can be tested formally on the figure-eight courses that now offer



Trausti and clinic participant Mitch Martin discuss the finer points of Tölt in Harmony. Photo by Elyn Norris.



“A circle is not a circle unless it is a circle!” Trausti coaching Helga Thordarson and Eyvindur frá Oddhóli. Photo by Elyn Norris.

competitors an alternative to the oval track. But the approach encompasses so much more than riding in circles. According to Trausti, Tölt in Harmony is a pathway to increased pleasure and beautiful riding that can happen anywhere.

Trausti also shared that he was surprised at the quality of the horses at this U.S. clinic. He believed that several of the horses could ultimately perform Tölt in Harmony quite well and a few might have the ability to represent the U.S. in the World Championships. All of us were primarily trail riders, with little or no competition experience, but we were duly inspired!

### TRAUSTI'S DREAM

Trausti concluded by stating that he has a “big ambition.” He expects all pupils in his international riding school to become better riders. He wants each and every one of us to experience “the pure joy of a slow, dancing tölt.” Given these high expectations, it makes perfect sense that Trausti requires passion and perseverance in his students. Those of us who experienced moments of genuine “dancing” with our horses were hooked—and we hoped that the prerequisite tenacity had been demonstrated. As the clinic drew to a close late Sunday, we waited to hear if we had passed Trausti’s test: Were we enthusiastic and dedicated enough to warrant his return for a second clinic? We were all quite pleased when, as the sun

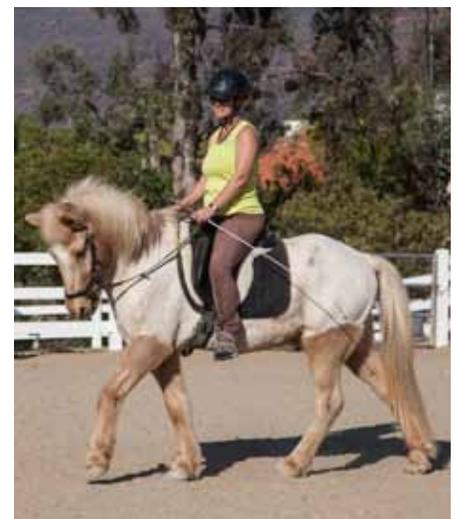
waned in the west, Trausti smiled broadly and inquired, casually, “Okay, my California students ... when shall I return?”

Trausti’s reputation as a gifted teacher is well-earned and his clinics are highly recommended. We eagerly anticipate his return in May, when our group will perhaps be ready for a beginning-level Tölt in Harmony course. In the meanwhile, we are busy practicing what we learned ... all of it ... 1,833 times. Stay tuned.

### MORE INFO

Visit Trausti’s Riding School at <http://traustisridingschool.weebly.com>

See the Tölt in Harmony patterns in this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zo2qYQTRzAE>



Susanne Hoover on Drifandi, practicing good circles. Photo by Elyn Norris.

# THE MYTH OF THE QUICK FIX

BY ANNIE ASTON



Steinar Sigurbjörnsson and Annie Aston working with Gerpír II from Fitjamyri at Mountain Icelandic Farm in Watsonville, CA, in December 2014. Photo by Alexandra Venable.

Most of us—novice and experienced alike—have witnessed the miraculous results when a natural horsemanship practitioner trains a horse in 30 minutes, as is often demonstrated at clinics and expos around the world.

But this “quick-fix” method, while impressive, has some unwanted consequences when the horse is brought home. It often becomes evident that many of the undesired behaviors still persist. As owners, we then attempt to replicate the same techniques that these expert trainers used in their demonstrations. But without a clear understanding of the science of Learning Theory, we create a confusing learning environment for the horse (and frustration for us when we can’t get the same results).

As a student at Guelph University in the Equine Studies program, I have

been researching Learning Theory as it relates to horse behavior. It has been very fruitful for me to be able to learn the theory behind the training techniques that many experienced horse trainers seem to practice intuitively. I have been involved with Icelandic horses for over 15 years, and have been able to make great strides with my new horse, Gerpír II frá Fitjamyri, using this knowledge. I also worked at Fitjamyri Farm in Vernon, BC, for five months. There, I witnessed first hand how the principles of Learning Theory are implicit in all training methods and, when applied correctly, can bring great success when training our horses. With this article, I hope to share with you these principles, and demonstrate why the idea of a “quick fix” is a myth.

## LEARNING THEORY

While it is tempting to attribute the success

of expert trainers to a sort of “secret power” they possess, which allows them to communicate with horses—a power that lies beyond the boundary of scientific inquiry—in actuality, these trainers are merely experts at understanding and implementing Learning Theory. In an equine science book for veterinarians, Paul McGreevy says: “Due to a generalized lack of understanding of learning theory, alongside the superhuman training abilities presented by many natural horsemanship practitioners, it has become a mistaken belief that training is more art than science.”

What exactly is Learning Theory? Learning Theory was developed by B. F. Skinner in the 1950s; it provides a simple psychological framework for understanding how animals (and humans) learn. According to Learning Theory, there are two ways in which behavior is shaped: through reinforcements (think reward),

and through punishments. When a horse is rewarded immediately after performing a certain behavior, that reward increases the likelihood that he will enact that behavior again. Conversely, when a horse is punished after performing a certain behavior, the likelihood of him performing that behavior again decreases. Seems simple enough, right? But there is another dimension to Learning Theory, and that is whether the reinforcements or punishments are positive or negative.

### POSITIVE VS. NEGATIVE

Positive does not mean “good” and negative does not mean “bad” in the context of Learning Theory. Rather, positive means that something is “given” to a horse (think addition), and negative means something is “taken away” (think subtraction).

A positive reinforcement is something that is given to a horse that increases the likelihood that the horse will repeat the same behavior, for instance, a treat given for good work! A good example of this is Clicker training.

A negative reinforcement is something that is taken away from a horse in order to increase the likelihood that a horse will repeat the same behavior again. This type of reward is often used through pressure and release training. The release of pressure is rewarding for the horse.

A positive punishment occurs when something is given to a horse that decreases the likelihood that a given behavior will be repeated in the future. An example of this can be smacking a horse when he nips you or threatens to kick you. Please note: Positive punishment should be limited to very specific situations; I will address this in greater depth later in this article.

A negative punishment occurs when something is taken away from a horse that decreases the likelihood that a behavior will be repeated again in the future. An example of this would be to put your horse in a time-out when he is misbehaving (psychologically this does not work in the same way for horses as it does for humans, therefore it is an ineffective method).

The diagram on this page gives a visual summary of the four techniques in Learning Theory that are used to shape behavior.

### WHICH IS BEST?

According to many studies over the last century, the best methods of horse training



Annie riding Gerpir II from Fitjamyri at Steinar’s clinic in December 2014. Photo by Alexandra Venable.

	<b>Punishment</b> (decreasing behavior)	<b>Reinforcement</b> (increasing behavior)
<b>Positive</b> (adding)	adding something to decrease behavior	adding something to increase behavior
<b>Negative</b> (subtracting)	subtracting something to decrease behavior	subtracting something to increase behavior



Kathy Sierra working with Draumur at liberty at her home farm in Watsonville, CA. Longer and slower approaches, based on clear reinforcement, let the horse relax as it learns. Photo by Bert Bates.

typically include a combination of positive and negative reinforcements tailored to the needs of each individual horse. The goal is to provide a relaxed and positive environment in which the horse can succeed.

In general most animals, including horses, do not respond well to punishment. Even when it does seem to be effective, it comes with unwanted and sometimes dangerous side-effects that might show up when least expected. The only time punishment may be appropriate is when it is used to correct dangerous behavior, such as biting or kicking. That being said, before engaging in punishment-based training techniques, it is very important to assess why the horse is displaying dangerous behavior, and to avoid interpreting a horse's response through the lens of human emotion. For instance, responses may not be limited to handling: A horse may develop unwanted behavior patterns due to physical pain caused by injury, ill-fitting tack, or more often improper nutrition and/or feeding practices. Each horse should be treated as an individual, and efforts should be made to rule out any outside influences that may be causing physical or emotional distress to the horse.

Another reason to avoid punishment techniques is that it induces fear in the horse, and fear responses are very difficult

for horses to unlearn. As prey animals, hyper-vigilance is hardwired into the horse's brain through millions of years of evolution. Due to this evolutionary design, V. L. Voith notes in "Principles of Learning," "escape and avoidance responses acquired as the result of negative reinforcement are usually difficult to extinguish, even if the animal has only experienced the aversive stimulus one time."

For this reason, equine scientists warn against approaches to training that involve chasing—such as many of the round-penning techniques used by some natural horsemanship practitioners. Chasing-based round-penning is highly effective in producing results, but it tends to elicit a fear response due to the horses' innate tendency towards hyper-vigilance under threat. Only a slower approach to training, with consistent behavior reinforcement, can override the natural instinct of the horse to fight, flight, or freeze.

If taken to an extreme, fear-inducing training techniques can lead to learned helplessness, a sad condition where the horse gives up trying altogether because of a learned belief that he has no control over his environment. An example of this condition can be found in older school horses that are described as "dead-sided" with "dead-mouths." This type of horse has suffered years of incorrect use of pressure-release techniques from novice riders, and

as a result has learned that he must endure the inconsistent jabbing and pulling or risk being punished.

Horses should have the freedom to voice their frustration, especially if it is warranted due to poor treatment, and they should be given a chance to understand what behavior is expected by clear and consistent feedback given by their riders and handlers. It is our responsibility as horse owners, riders, and trainers to ensure that this sad condition does not develop in our beloved equine partners.

### **WHY "QUICK FIX" METHODS BREAK DOWN**

Miraculous-seeming natural horsemanship demonstrations are based entirely on a highly skilled use of negative reinforcement. While the principle of negative reinforcement is simple to understand, implementing negative reinforcement skillfully is very difficult.

Expert natural horsemanship practitioners have their timing and their understanding of horse behavior fine-tuned to such a high degree that they are able to implement the principles of Learning The-



Annie Aston riding Gerpir II from Fitjamyri at Fitjamyri Farm in Vernon, BC, in spring 2014. Photo by Toos Faber.



The best training methods typically blend both positive and negative reinforcement. Here, Alexandra Venable rides Aegir at liberty at Coast Road Stables in Santa Cruz, CA. Photo by Eleanor Anderson.

ory with extreme precision. Shocking as it may seem, it is not uncommon for some trainers to be unaware of the fact that they have perfected the principles of Learning Theory by trial and error through their years of experience training horses; they may have never actually studied Learning Theory itself.

Most of us cannot replicate their results after attending a clinic, because we lack the subtlety of the expert's timing and precision. As such, we should be wary of "quick-fix" training regimes, especially when dealing with horses that have long-standing problems. After all, what is the point of achieving results if they cannot be adequately maintained?

Simply put, "quick-fix" training methods are too unstable. The novice may return home after a natural horsemanship clinic, or more commonly after the purchase of a new horse, and before long the horse's behavior regresses or new prob-

lems appear. An example we've probably all experienced is when a novice rider gets a new horse that is "perfect" for the first few weeks, but it's not long before the horse starts showing behavior problems, some of which can be dangerous to the horse or handler!

While it is possible to demonstrate fast results with a horse, based on very precise timing of reinforcements, by not taking our time to shape learned behaviors effectively, the human-horse relationship suffers. The main problem is a lack of stimulus control. Stimulus control can be defined as the horse responding every time it is cued and only when it is cued, regardless of the environment or circumstance (McGreevy, 2004). We must devote time and be consistent, repeating a learned behavior over and over to solidify the response. The more quickly a horse learns a difficult or complex behavior, the more likely our relationship with the horse will suffer from learning/communication dysfunctions. Worse, these dysfunctions often lead to extinction of the behaviors we most want!

### A SUSTAINABLE APPROACH

By focusing on longer and slower approaches to training, based on clear, consistent and well-timed reinforcements, the horse is able to relax as he learns, and the learned behaviors are more consistent and robust. If we rush a step or skip a step, we risk the horse becoming stiff, fearful, and tense, essentially creating a "problem horse" that is difficult to handle (Ísólfsson, 2003). Our horses are, of course, not



Annie Aston riding Glampi (aka Batman) in a competition at Mountain Icelandic Farm in Watsonville, CA. Photo by Isaac Dwyer.

## ANIMAL TRAINING 101

BOOK REVIEW BY  
NICKI ESDORN

If you are, like me, interested in horse training, you have probably encountered a myriad of different philosophies and styles of animal training as you read books, watched videos, and tried to educate yourself. I always wished someone would comprehensively explain the science of how animals learn and the art of training them and present this information in one understandable package. Well, here it is! *Animal Training 101: The Complete and Practical Guide to the Art and Science of Behavior Modification* by Jenifer A. Zeligs, Ph.D.

This book was incredibly helpful to me. Jenifer Zeligs does not focus on one species of animal or one type of training: She explains the benefits and drawbacks of the entire spectrum of training methods. She breaks down difficult and complicated concepts into understandable steps. She gives you the scientifically correct framework to understand how animals learn and how to motivate them to actually want to learn and perform. She discusses communication through classical and operant conditioning, how to create motivation to do a certain behavior, the importance of desensitization, and, very importantly, how to cope with aggression. The last chapter deals with how to apply this knowledge in practical training and troubleshooting. The book is very well written and organized.

Why train? Here is Jenifer Zeligs' answer. She says, "My dream is for a world where fewer animals are forced, afraid, or confused and more engaged, comfortable, and cooperative."

Reading this book has given me the scientific information to judge training methods and trainers, and to choose how I want to work with my animals. I highly recommend it to anyone, novice and professional alike.

For more information, go to [www.animaltraining101.com](http://www.animaltraining101.com)



Lucy Nold riding Andri in competition at Flying C Ranch in Santa Ynez, CA. Photo by Jasmine Ho.

born knowing what our riding cues mean; these must be learned over time, similar to learning a new language. Our cues should always be simple and easy in the beginning, allowing the horse to build on a high quantity of small instances of success. Taking this approach, the learning process is positive for both the trainer and the horse.

The key to a slower, more sustainable approach is to train each horse in gradual increments, so that the horse can habituate to the new patterns of behavior successfully and with relaxation before tackling a new set of responses. In Learning Theory, this is called “shaping.” According to Voith (1986), shaping is a “technique whereby an animal is initially rewarded for behavior that resembles the ultimate behavior the person wants the animal to perform. At first, only an approximation of the ultimately desired behavior is reinforced. Progressively closer approximations are then reinforced until eventually only the precise behavior is rewarded.” By using shaping, we avoid the residual fears inherent in using positive punishment—fears that stifle the innate problem-solving skills of the horse. This is the difference between putting a subtle, consistent pressure on the horse and waiting for the response, versus

quickly escalating the pressure to the point of punishing the horse for not responding quickly enough.

An added benefit to choosing a longer and slower approach to training is that it gives the horse much-needed time to establish stable behavior responses, including giving the horse time to develop musculature and ligament strength through developing a topline slowly and naturally. In turn, this reduces the risk of the horse breaking down at an early age or suffering injuries that could easily have been prevented.

While the longer, slower approach to training is preferable to “quick fix” approaches, even the most well-trained patterns are still susceptible to degradation when the trained horse is handed off to a novice owner. In order for trainers to ensure that the horses they train have the most success for a long and happy relationship with a new or novice rider, it is essential that the new rider learn the cues to which the horse is accustomed. Trainers should therefore strive to teach the rider how to develop a trusting relationship with the horse. Sadly, many people overlook the fact that time is necessary to build this relationship, and instead they try to force a connec-

tion. The horse must feel autonomous in her willingness to respond to the human. When the horse willingly complies and responds to the trainer or rider, it means that the human has connected to the horse’s mind. When you connect to the mind, the body will follow (Ísólfsson, 2003).

## CONCLUSION

Whether you prefer Icelandic competition, Pleasure riding, Dressage, Western, Natural Horsemanship, Liberty, Jumping, or a combination of any of these, Learning Theory is the science behind how horses learn, and these practices can be applied within every discipline.

It is important to keep in mind that horses are always learning. The question is, what are we teaching them?

We must always remember that what we think we are teaching horses through our actions is not always what they are actually learning. Paul McGreevy states a valid point: “The unthinking rider who thrashes a horse for knocking down a fence runs the risk of associating fence jumping, be it clean or sloppy, with being hit. Rather than correctly associating a painful consequence with the undesirable behavior, many animals learn to fear the trainer or the training area.” A good trainer always remembers that millions of years of evolution tell the horse to “fight, flight, or freeze” when afraid, and it takes time to establish trust and to help the horse to override this instinct.

For all equestrians, novice and experienced alike, we can be confident that by applying the principles of Learning Theory with patience, we can create the results we most desire: A happy and willing horse who is not just a well-performing horse, but our partner in harmony, our dream horse, our *gæðingur!*

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# TREKKING 101

BY REBECCA BING



Trekking in Iceland is all about staying in the saddle and trusting your horse. Ask yourself, Are you ready? Photo by Rebecca Bing.

For several years I've been fortunate enough to ride on treks in Iceland every summer. There is nothing more satisfying than getting through a day being so close to nature, riding amazing horses, traveling with friends, and coming back to a home-cooked Icelandic meal. I am privileged to see the most breathtaking scenery I have ever imagined. Sometimes the landscape is completely untouched by man: No telephone poles or power lines for miles. The horses surprise me with their abilities and willingness. I am in awe.

There are times, though, when things don't go exactly as planned and I find myself asking, "Why am I doing this?"

Admittedly, a little fear is part of the rush I get from trekking. In order to have an optimum experience on a trek, I know I must relinquish all control and just enjoy the ride. It's all about staying in the saddle and trusting my horse. It is both physically and mentally challenging, and that's why I love it.

But it's not for everybody. For many years I have also organized treks through my company America2Iceland. Here are some tips I've compiled that I hope will help you decide if going on a trek in Iceland—with my or any other company—is really something you want to do. I'm not trying to sell you anything—maybe the reverse. Let me be clear: Trekking is not for the faint-of-heart.

## **BE HONEST ABOUT YOUR ABILITIES**

If you have doubts about your ability to enjoy riding six or more hours a day at a fast pace, over various terrain and under all weather conditions (think snow, sleet, freezing rain), and in all gaits, then stop reading right here. You're not ready for a trek. Being not just physically up for the challenge, but mentally prepared for it are prerequisites. Ideally all riders should be intermediate to advanced in skill-level. If you come from a different discipline and have not ridden an Icelandic horse

before, it would be wise to take lessons on the breed before hitting open terrain.

Even for intermediate and advanced riders, a trek is not like taking a trail ride at home. Chances are, you won't know your horses very well before the trek. On some treks, riders like to try as many horses as possible, switching horses at each and every break. If that's you, let your guide know and have fun. More important, if that's not you, your guide needs to know. You will still need two or more horses to get you through a 25-mile day. You need to be a good enough rider that you can "read" each horse and adjust your riding style accordingly. And if I have to explain to you why you need more than one horse per day, well, let's just say that trekking probably isn't for you.

## **CHOOSE YOUR TACK WISELY**

The tack you are given before the first ride is the tack you will use and be responsible for during the entire trek. Check it carefully for wear. Most of the

tack used on treks is old and well-loved. Now's the time to get a new girth or stirrup leather—not when it breaks 10 miles from home. Your guides will have checked the tack too, but it's easy to miss something.

Be sure to pick a saddle that you will be comfortable in—again, if you don't know how to do that by just looking at the available saddles, then trekking is probably not for you. On many treks, you will also be expected to fit the bridle and noseband on your horse properly. Your guide may show you how the first time, but won't check it every day unless you ask.

At the end of the day, you'll want to keep your bridle, saddle, and helmet together. I always bring along a roll of colored tape so I can mark my stuff. Sometimes I mark my horses as well by a special hair braid woven with colored tape or yarn, especially if the herd is predominantly one color. People have picked out the wrong horse before. Trust me, it's happened.

## BE PATIENT

There are times when you'll be told to hurry up and wait. Some horses can be difficult to catch, and the bigger the field or enclosure, the longer it can take. Sometimes you need three or four people to catch one horse, and you're welcome to get involved in that process. It's a great way to work up a sweat before riding!

Once you've caught them, but before you can safely take your trusted companions out for vigorous work, you must attend to their needs. Each horse must be inspected to see if it needs salve applied to its lips, needs shoes, or if there are any lameness issues—in which case the horse will be left behind at the night's corral



Be sure to check your tack for soundness before the trek, and pick a saddle that is comfortable and fits you and the horse. Photo by Rebecca Bing.

and you'll be assigned a new one. It can be really frustrating to be all ready to go, only to find yourself eating your packed lunch before the start of the day. But at least the sun is still shining! (Not always.)

## CHOOSE YOUR POSITION

On most treks in Iceland, the spare horses—whether 10 or 100—run loose between the riders. You need to decide, are you a front rider or a back rider? Sometimes your horse makes the decision for you: Always ask your guide if your horse is a front or back horse before you pick your position.

*Front Riders:* As a front rider, you have chosen to ride in front of the loose herd. Ideally you are on a horse that prefers to be ridden in the front. Some horses that are unruly in the back tend to calm down in the front. The front riders are responsible for keeping the pace of the ride and for opening the gates. That means they have to be close to the guide and somewhat close to the herd, but they also have to be aware of terrain changes because

the herd behind them will also have to go through it. An example would be going through a lava field with sharp rocks. The front riders need to slow down to a walk so that the loose horses don't go too fast and possibly injure themselves. Same thing for going up and down hills or through deep water crossings. The front riders need to be constantly aware of the herd behind them, so they don't lead them into danger. There are cattle guards and gates to be aware of too, so front riders must always be in communication with the guide. If you have eyes in the back of your head, this is the spot for you.

*Back Riders:* The back riders have the best view, unless it's dry and dusty. Again, find out in advance if your horse can be ridden in the back. The back riders must make sure not to push the herd too hard, or else the herd can bunch up and split off in different directions. If and when that happens (and it probably will), you might find yourself blessed with a horse who thinks it's his job to keep the rest of the herd in line. If you end up with a work horse like this on your hands, it can be loads of fun—just make sure you are ready for it. It's also possible to ride in the back and just go along with the herd. Back riders have to close the gates, but usually your guide will have helpers to do that. If you can summon your inner cowgirl or cowboy, it can be a fun job to close the gates just to have the opportunity to ride fast to catch up with the group.

## THE STARTING GATE

The beginning of the ride is always the most adrenaline pumping, heart-in-the-throat part of the entire day. Do try and remind yourself of this. The horses have



It's not all open terrain in Iceland: Here, a trekking group rides through birch "forest" in the rain. Photo by Rebecca Bing.

been waiting as patiently as they possibly can. Once the herd starts moving, your horse will go whether you are on it or not. So, unless you are good at a flying mount, be sure you are on your horse before the guides are on theirs and/or the gates are opened. Ask one of the guides to hold your horse's head if you have any doubt you can mount safely—do not put your fellow travelers at risk by asking a friend to do this for you.

The main thing is to make sure you've got the right horse, your tack is on correctly, your stirrups are in their proper positions, you have both hands on the reins, and you follow the guide's instructions. There is no turning back at this point. Most of the horses won't be able to stand still, so the key is to let them move a little if they are getting anxious. Just sit and breathe, relax into your seat bones, and wait for the fun to begin.

### ENJOY THE SCENERY

Once the horses understand they are actually on a long-distance trek, they go into "energy conservation" mode. They pick their positions within the herd, settle down, and choose their favorite gait—which you hope is also your favorite gait. This is when it's maybe possible to take photos and enjoy the scenery.

If you are a back rider, then you are fortunate enough to observe the herd dynamics while traveling. The loose herd is constantly establishing a hierarchy, and sometimes this can wreak havoc. A lone horse may feel more comfortable tagging along with a friend who is being ridden in the back, or you might see the herd trying to split up and go in different directions.

### RELINQUISH ALL CONTROL

More often than not, the herd will stick close together, and it's highly unlikely that your horse will turn around and take off in the opposite direction. Your job as a rider is to pick a position, either front or back, and stay there. Getting caught in the middle of the herd is not a desirable place to be.

But other than keeping your place in the herd, there's not much "riding" you can do. If you are a control freak, then a trek might not be for you. When traveling with a herd, it's not possible to micromanage the horse's every step. Your horse is better able than you are to pick the best footing, so just trust your horse. As long as your horse

isn't pushing the herd too hard (if you're a back rider), or leading the group too slowly or too fast (as a front rider), then you just need to go with the flow.

### ALL GAITS REQUIRED

Admit it, we all love this breed because of the tölt. A good trekking horse can tölt for a decent amount of time. However, it's not physically possible to expect your horse to tölt up hills, through mud, and on sketchy terrain. Please give your horse a break! Unless you've been blessed with a natural tölting machine, trying to force it into tölt the entire ride is not kind, nor is it good horsemanship. Let the horse trot when it needs to. You will most likely experience all of the gaits on a trek. There's no avoiding trot, and sometimes there's no avoiding piggy pace, so if that's an issue for you, don't go trekking.

### OBSTACLES

There are times when the trek will have to travel along Route 1 or another busy road to get to a trail. It can add an element of danger, but it is also an amazing sight for tourists, who will stop their cars to take photos. This is your fifteen seconds of fame, so enjoy it! You might also experience some very inept drivers—both tourists and Icelanders—who are completely unaware of how to operate a vehicle around a herd of loose horses. Always be aware!

### RESPECT ALL RIDERS

Everyone has their own reasons for going on a trek. It might be one of their own personal riding goals, it could be on their

bucket list, they might want to experience the beauty of Iceland, enjoy time with friends, or satisfy that inner cowgirl/boy. Whatever the reason, we are all traveling with the horses as a collective group. Therefore, the safety of all riders and horses is of the utmost importance.

Trekking is not a competition, but at times it can bring out a competitive nature in riders. The most successful treks are when all riders respect each other and work together. It requires a team effort, and if we can remind ourselves that these horses are living, breathing animals, not machines, then we can have a truly wonderful experience.

### WHEN IN ICELAND, THINK LIKE AN ICELANDER

*Petta reddast* is an Icelandic phrase or philosophy that means, "Don't worry, it will all work out." It truly captures Icelandic optimism, but it can also be an issue with those who like a clearly planned itinerary. Remember this when trekking, because chances are most of your Icelandic guides will have this philosophy. Don't be surprised if one of them runs into an old friend on the road and stops to talk, or is doing business deals on his or her cellphone while you are trying to ask a very important question. Just breathe and know it will all work out. You will be a better person after a trek, I promise. But make sure you're ready before you go.

*Editor's note: This article also appears on the America2Iceland blog at <http://www.america2iceland.com/horse-trekking-iceland-101/>*



The best treks happen when riders respect each other—and their horses—and work together. Photo by Rebecca Bing.

# THE MOST USEFUL SERVANT

BY LISA PLIEGO

Iceland is a mecca for any Icelandic horse enthusiast. It is the mysterious place that formed and shaped these horses, much like it did the lava rocks they tölt over. There is the Americanized version of the Icelandic horse, and then there is the near-mythical creature born of folklore and legend from the Vikings who settled on this volcanic island.

Once I owned my first Icelandic horse, I dreamed of experiencing this breed in the place where Sleipnir, the legendary eight-legged horse of the god Odin, came to life. I wanted to see if reality matched the stories I had heard about their incredible feats.

Stories of farmers out trekking when a white-out storm came suddenly, obliterating all landmarks and turning the land into a slurry of blur. Only the brave Icelandic horse with its keen sense of direction somehow found its way back home, thus saving the life of its rider.

The story of the oldest Icelandic horse on record, which reached the age of 56 and pulled a woman's egg cart her whole life. When the woman died of old age, her faithful horse died a week afterward, a testament to the strong bond and partnership they shared.

Stories of horses called the "bridges of Iceland" for their ability to swim across bodies of water carrying a rider or supplies. Iceland has lakes, rivers, and streams that create liquid roadblocks at every turn. If not for these horses, how would Iceland have been initially inhabited and settled? They were literally the boats, cars, tractors, and ATVs for the Vikings, who had no other form of transportation. They earned the name "the most useful servant" in honor of their contributions.

Then there's the story of the powerful, breathtaking show horses, bred from the highest performing stallions and mares, judged not only on their gaits but also on conformation, ridability, and freedom. These are the showboats, the movie stars of the Icelandic world. They are displayed in full-page glossy pictures in the magazines, and have a fan following that gives bragging rights to anyone with a foal

from one of these genetically gifted stars.

When I decided to go to Iceland, it was to gain a deeper understanding of the breed and to experience them in the place to which they were so perfectly adapted. I will begin my own story with my initial introduction to the breed, and end with how my perception of them changed the more I learned.

## FUZZY PONIES

There is a small pocket of enthusiastic Icelandic horse riders in my area. They would ride their Icelandics at the park, in a parade or breed exhibition, and even up and down some of the roads by my house. My first impression was these were small, fuzzy ponies, but to describe them as such was to incur the wrath of any Icelandic aficionado. My misconception was swiftly corrected: "They are a horse. There isn't even a word for pony in the Icelandic language. They ride like a horse." I was soon to find out what they meant.

At the time I rode an Arabian who had a very reactive personality. Elegant and refined to look at, he shied frequently and would occasionally bolt, even after five solid years of training. One day my neighbor invited me out for a ride, she on her gelding, Glennur, and I on my Arabian, Desi.

The contrast between the two breeds was eye opening: Her sturdy chestnut handled obstacles in a calm steady manner, as she tölted and trotted full speed down the dirt road, smiling broadly. My ride was quite different. I stayed on high alert to anything Desi could view as a horse-eating troll. Mailboxes, waving flags, sprinklers, cars, and running children can unnerve many horses, but Glennur breezed right past, leading the way with his full mane bobbing in rhythm to his tölt.

Dismounting after our ride, my friend looked happy and relaxed. I, on the other hand, felt as if I had taken my life in my own hands. "I know of an Icelandic for sale that you can try," my friend offered. It was in that weakened state that I agreed to try one.

## STEADY AND FEARLESS

I don't necessarily believe in love at first sight, but when I met Andi for the first time, that is exactly what it was. She was an eight-year-old mare with an ample back-end like a quarterhorse and a huge mane and forelock to balance it out. I mounted for our first ride, and down the road we went, steady and fearless. She loved to canter or pace, yet I never felt afraid. I knew in that moment this horse would change me.



Hrannar looking out while the trekkers stop for a break the mountains. Photo by Lisa Pliego.

Within days Andi came home with me, and it was she who taught me what it felt like to trust a horse completely.

Her steady temperament allowed me to take her anywhere, and she would do her best, no matter the circumstances. Parades, drill team, and trail rides were all done with aplomb. While riding with other Icelandics, we usually followed last because Andi wasn't a super forward horse; she was the kind they said most Americans like to ride. Andi became part of our family, but I longed to try the spirited, fast creature I was told the Icelanders liked to ride.

Having developed a taste for speed and strong, smooth gaits, I now tried other Icelandic horses. We would play musical horses and switch throughout the ride, so we could try each other's horse. It was a great way to experience different gaits, and it also showed me how each horse has a unique feel. It was during these years that the dream of traveling to Iceland and experiencing the Icelandic in its own environment was born.

## ADVENTURES

Some of our group had already been to Iceland and told exciting stories about their adventures. We tried to recreate the Icelandic style of riding, from the way we mounted to the long stretches of fast tölt, trot, and canter. We shared shoeing techniques, feeding tips, and tölt advice, attending clinics or lessons when we could.

When I finally took the plunge and left for an Icelandic riding trek on June 13, 2014, I felt prepared and legged up, ready to experience the Icelandic horse in Iceland and see if it was different from my experience with them in the U.S.

## ANOTHER PLANET

When you view Iceland for the first time, and see its dark mammary volcanoes jutting through the ashy ground, vast stretches of rutted sheep trails, endless ocean shoreline, and rivulets of water eroding alleys in the rock, it feels like another planet. The surreal environment is nearly treeless, yet dotted with scrubby bushes, carpets of green grass, and fields of lavender lupine that add color to the muted expanse of terrain.

The horse is woven into the land, hooves hewn from the rocks they tread upon and nourished by lush grass growing on the volcanic ash. In this *mélange* of stark beauty, the Icelandic horse thrived to



Lisa's favorite trekking horse, Hrannar, tacked up by the holding pen and ready to go. Photo by Lisa Pliego.

become the strong, independent spirit it is today.

Trekking horses in Iceland are swift and sensible, trained to cover miles of rough terrain with surefooted speed. They know their job, and it is best to let them do it. A stout paint mare named Laufey was the horse chosen for me to begin this journey; I would also take my final ride of the trip on this incredible mare.

I had chosen to do a horse-herding trek: We would move a herd of approximately 20 horses across Western Iceland. Farmers send horses to be part of this herd to exercise them and teach them how to trek. They learn how to navigate rough ground, how to run into holding pens or graze in a cordoned-off grassy area, and get shoes replaced in the field. Some are saddled and ridden until the next stop, and then changed out for a fresh horse. I heard that many horses taking part in the National Icelandic Horse Competition, *Landsmót*, are driven with a herd to the show, not bubble-wrapped and trailered, but put to the ultimate fitness test before the biggest event of their lives. To be a great horse with the opportunity to breed in Iceland means more than physical beauty, it must be sound of mind and body, as well as having stellar gaits.

My second horse was Hrannar, which means "wave"; it was the perfect name for a horse that swam across a deep tide pool with me for the first time. His gaits left me breathless, and I will admit to hysteri-

cal laughter at one point, while cutting through the salty ocean mist along the shoreline in flying pace.

## DEEPER CONNECTION

When comparing our Icelandic horses in the U.S. to the ones in Iceland, I think the character is the same, but environment and how we manage them can be very different. We lack the wide open spaces and challenging terrain that condition the mind and body, while strengthening the hooves. In Iceland, the horses are expected to be forward and sensible, not to kick, and they are by nature independent and hardy. But in the U.S., they are often overfed, coddled, and underworked. Learning about this unique breed in the place they have lived for over 1,100 years gives insight into the needs of this hard-working horse in America.

The image of the Icelandic horse intertwined with the landscape of Iceland helps me to understand my own horse. This is not the "My Little Pony" of a young girl's fantasy, but an equine built to survive on a volcanic island. Icelandic horses command a dedicated following: The people are as strong and independent as the horses they love. Now each time I ride my Icelandic horse, I feel a deeper connection. I have made a pilgrimage to their land and spent time with their relatives... and the stories they tell me are all true.

# YOUTH ESSAYS

## SEARCH AND RESCUE

BY SASHA ROLAND

*On June 13-15, the nonprofit organization "Mustangs to the Rescue" sponsored an Equine Air Scenting clinic in Sisters, OR. Sasha Roland, age 17, and her Icelandic horse Svartbakur attended; they have been a team for about two years, and Svartbakur is certified for the Wasco County Mounted Sheriff Posse. Sasha filed this report:*

When my mom first told me about the Equine Air Scenting Search and Rescue clinic, I was kind of shocked. I had never heard of horses tracking scents.

So I Googled "Equine Air Scenting" and found this at <http://www.airscenting-horse.com/home.htm>:

"Equine scenting is a technique where a horse is trained to locate a specific scent and, under a certain command, follow it and find the source. This can be and is used for live people, kadavers, drugs, etc. The horse is given a mask (that closely resembles a strainer) which is placed over the nose and attached to the bridle or halter. This mask is only put on when the rider is actively searching for their target, and the horse is trained

to only search when wearing this mask and after receiving the specified command (which is chosen at the beginning of training by the rider). The idea of the mask is to prevent the horse from reaching down to eat food along the trail, and as an extra signal to start working. Once the horse has caught the scent, it will either give you strong signals or, depending on the amount of training it has had, will simply turn into the scent and follow it on its own to the target. It is a method used for Search and Rescue responses when a Mounted Search and Rescue team is required."

Even so, I have to admit that I was a little skeptical when we arrived at the clinic. Luckily enough, I completely changed my opinion when I began working with my Icelandic horse, Svartbakur. We spent the weekend learning how to work together and find the smell of a person. Svartbakur taught me to listen to him and to pay attention to my surroundings, including the horse I ride.

When we started training on the first day, Svartbakur was feeling a bit energetic, and it was hard for us to work with each other. In the first lesson, one person held a tin can of treats and shook it in front of the horse, making sure the horse could smell it. Then the person walked



Clinician Terry Nowacki watches closely as Sasha starts a grid search on her gelding Svartbakur. Photo by Kate Beardsley.

away and hid behind a tree. My job was to let Svartbakur follow that person, which he did by trotting after him across the fallen branches, almost causing me to fall. So our first day was a little bumpy.

The second day we searched in a larger area, with the person already hidden. This was when we really began to work together. I watched as Svartbakur gave me signs, like a twitch of his ears, or drifting in the direction of the hidden person. I felt like we could be a really good team, and he appeared to think so too.

On the last day, there was a point where we were supposed to go out by ourselves into the woods and take our horses for a walk, alone, so we could become more focused on each other. As I was walking down a hill, slightly lost, I noticed Svartbakur giving the usual signs that he had caught a scent, so I gave him the reins and let him carry me. We almost immediately turned 90 degrees, and he began walking in a straight line. Just when I thought he was just goofing around, we stumbled upon a log cabin! He had led me back to the road and to people. I jumped down and rewarded him as instructed, but with a little more vigor than expected. He had taught me a very valuable lesson: If your horse is trying to tell you something, listen. Because not only could it help either you or him, but you will each earn respect for the other.



Sasha Roland and Svartbakur joined other riders at an Equine Air Scenting clinic in Oregon in June. Photo by Kate Beardsley.

## PERSONALITY AND HEART

BY ZOE JOHNSON

Even when I was three, I loved horses. One day, I asked my mom when I could take riding lessons. Now, no one will give a three-year-old horseback riding lessons, so my parents doubled my age and said, "When you are six." Three years later, two weeks before my sixth birthday, I asked my mom where I would take my horseback riding lessons. She had completely forgotten about that conversation over the course of three years, so she had no idea.

The next week she left for Iceland, where my grandmother had traveled to celebrate her 75th birthday. On her trip, she had her first experience with Icelandic horses. Instantly she knew this amazing breed was perfect for me. Now there was just the problem of where to find an Icelandic horse trainer near the little town of Monument, CO. The day she returned from her trip, she parked at the grocery store next to a truck whose side read "Tamangur Icelandic Horses: Training, Boarding, and Lessons." As soon as my mom got home she looked up Tamangur and found that it was right in our area, so my parents signed me up for lessons in time for my birthday. That was



Just a few months after her first lesson, Zoe and her mom participated in a schooling show in Steamboat Springs, CO. Photo by Coralie Denmeade.

definitely one of the best birthday presents ever! That was five years ago.

As it turns out, Coralie Denmeade, the instructor at Tamangur, is one of the nicest people there are. She's the best horse instructor you could ever hope for, and I got to be her first youth student. As I advanced from being walked on a lunge line to trotting to being off the lunge line to cantering, everyone started to realize that I was going to stick with it and that this was going to become a full-time hobby.

At my first schooling show, I was the only junior rider, so that made it easier for me in the youth class. The judge especially liked it when I slid off the rear of the horse to dismount. My only other class was the sit-a-buck, where riders sit on a dollar bill while riding walk, trot, and canter. I, of course, lost my dollar before the adults did, but they decided to give me the prize anyway.

As I progressed, I only fell off once. The fall didn't hurt because of Icelandics' short bodies. Freydis, the horse I was riding, almost stepped on me but sensed I was there and held her hoof in the air to avoid injuring me. Boy, was I grateful for that!

After I had been riding for a while, Jenna, my best friend at the time, joined too. We started riding in group lessons together, and I had a partner for youth classes at shows, which was great. I did more schooling shows, first in the round pen and then in the ring. They are always so much fun, because all the riders and judges are very nice and there is never a feeling of unkindness.

This year was the first time I got up the nerve to compete in a more professional show. My mom, who is now also taking lessons at Tamangur, a few other girls who are taking lessons, and I all went on a plane to a show in Kentucky. It was a blast! I competed in youth tölt and four-gait and three-gait events on a lesson horse from Tamangur. Everyone got a little bit nervous, but there was really no reason to be. The classes were all fun and everyone congratulated you no matter how well you did. I can't believe it took so long for me to decide to go.

Just two weeks ago my family decided to buy our own horse. We still wanted an Icelandic, so told Barbara Frische, one of the judges from the schooling show, that we were looking for a horse that would be good for competing in shows, but



First ride in Colorado after a long trip from Germany: Zoe and Prins. Photo by Coralie Denmeade.

one that also has a good personality and heart. She immediately said that she had the perfect horse for us. His name was Prins and he was five years old, but unfortunately he was in Germany. She told us more about him, and we decided to take a look at him and see if we wanted to buy him. Over Thanksgiving, we went to Germany to try him out. As it turns out, he was perfect. We bought him and shipped him back to the United States, where he arrived at the barn the same week. Prins is the most wonderful horse we could have asked for, and my mom and I both love him.

Icelandics are the perfect breed of horse for me. Although they are short, they have huge hearts and are amazingly talented.

# A DISCOVERY FOR SURE

BY DEB CALLAWAY

With this issue, the *Quarterly* is starting a new series of conversations with USIHC members. Although I am proud to introduce Stephanie Sher to our readers, I almost feel foolish. Stephanie has been involved with Icelandic horses in the United States for a very long time. And she is the one who introduced me to them not so very long ago. Icelandic horses, the USIHC, and I could not have a truer friend than Stephanie Sher of Naples, NY.

*Deb: Stephanie, I know you do not keep your age a secret, you were 76 on your last birthday. Of those 76 years, how many have included Icelandic horses, one or more? When did you discover them?*

Stephanie: Well, it was a discovery for sure. I grew up loving horses. I was one of those little girls who was horse crazy, and I didn't outgrow it. My parents were not horse people at all—that gene must have skipped a generation, and I got it from my westward pioneer grandparents. We were not wealthy by any means, and there were four of us children. But that said, they humored me and allowed me to have a pony. A neighbor gave us a little white Shetland pony mare that made it her career to dump me every single time I got on her. Even with that rough introduction to horse ownership I was not swayed from loving any and all horses from that tender age.

But the discovery of Icelandics as a breed came when I was grown, married, and owned horses, an Arab for me and an American Quarter horse for my husband, Larry. I remember my first awareness of Icelandics quite clearly. I was flying from one East Coast city to another on business, and I was reading the airline magazine you find in the seat pockets. The article was about elite items people own, very expensive, hard to find items. I don't remember a single other item listed but among them was an Icelandic horse. I even remember the horse, it was Pá, and the magazine listed his owner, Dan Slott. It was love at first sight for me—the horse, not Dan! Looking back at my reaction, I think



Stephanie Sher and a new friend: Embla frá Keldum. Photo by Andrea Barber.

Pá being the traditional Icelandic horse with his full flowing mane and tail fit the childhood ideal I had held but forgotten. And Pá and all Icelandic horses definitely had a wonderful advocate in Dan. Dan promoted not only Pá, but the entire breed of Icelandic horses. I remember later learning that he took Pá into the city for a television promotion, Pá being taken up a freight elevator to the studios! Now just because I saw the article about Icelandic horses and fell in love on paper, I didn't immediately pursue acquiring an

Icelandic. The article left me feeling that an ordinary person such as I couldn't find or afford something so fine. But the idea was planted and wouldn't be stilled. In the coming years, my husband Larry and I visited Anne Elwell at her farm in New York and began to gather information about Icelandics, as well as visiting the Vermont Icelandic Horse Farm. We even went to Canada. We met people involved with the breed that have remained lifelong friends. And we began to form the idea of owning Icelandics and turn it in to a reality.

*Deb: You are primarily a pleasure rider and driver. Can you describe what pleasure riding or driving means to you personally?*

Stephanie: Now that you mention it, my ideal pleasure ride has changed over the years. As that little girl with a naughty white pony, I dreamed of a ride where I stayed on! At least mostly! At another time, it was a ride at full gallop on a wet sandy beach. An ideal pleasure ride a bit more recently meant hauling between one and four horses to a trailhead, saddling up, and riding a marked trail with a group of like-minded riders, taking several hours to complete. But now my rides are shorter and usually closer to home. For safety's sake I never ride alone, but having a stable of four horses means someone can easily ride along with me. The trails on my farm are quite varied, they include woods, farmland, hills, and country roads, and if we ride off of the farm we can ride more of the same sort of terrain as on my farm, plus paved roads where we get that wonderful sound of a group of horses tölt-ing, Black and Decker, Black and Decker! [Reader, please insert a big smile that lights up Stephanie's face!] And with the effects of the four distinct seasons we have in Western New York, it doesn't get boring at all. I have a fenced arena with excellent footing, but personally do very little arena work. Not that I shouldn't. I know that it is good training for both rider and horse, I just have little patience for repetition! But it is there and has served many people and horses well.

As for pleasure driving, I once thought that as I aged, and the horses too, that driving would be a more moderately strenuous form of horsemanship that would allow me and my horse to continue to satisfactorily interact as my physical strength and stamina declined. With that longterm goal in mind, I had all of my horses introduced to driving training. I know most horses are started with groundwork that involves the principles of driving, so it was not a big leap for any of them. Even though I enjoy driving, and some of my horses proved quite capable, it became very clear to me that there is nothing particularly sedate or relaxing about driving, especially driving a pair! I think in part that is due to the fact that so many automobile drivers we encounter on the public roads are not horse savvy

and do not drive with horse behaviors and reactions in mind. A country road can be very crowded when you're driving a team. Need I say more?

*Deb: What type of tack do you use?*

Stephanie: Old. Hah! Well, tack does last a long time. You buy a good saddle, even a good used saddle, and it lasts a long, long time. And I do like a saddle that is soft and broken in rather than new and squeaky. As long as a saddle is sound and safe, I am not one to go out and buy the newest style that comes along, any of my riding partners will tell you that. I have a tack room overflow-

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I WISH I HAD  
GOTTEN INTO  
ICELANDICS  
SOONER SO  
THAT I COULD  
HAVE HAD  
MORE TIME  
WITH THEM.

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ing with saddles. Seems as though every horse I acquired came with his or her own saddle, or I got one for them. Really I think the most important factor in a saddle is that it fits the horse, and the next most important criteria is that it fits me. But even though I ride an old saddle, I am also partial to a little bling. These past few years each of my horses got a custom-made headstall, decorated with turquoise and other semi-precious stones. Not only are the headstalls beautiful to look at, it makes each horse's bridle unique, easy to choose from the tack room. Some people put name tags on their bridles, I chose this way to customize them.

*Deb: Why did you join the USIHC?*

Stephanie: Why wouldn't I? Oops. Broke the rule about answering an interview question with a question! But to answer you, I loved Icelandics. I wanted to support the breed in any way I could. Supporting the USIHC by joining was one way to do that. There were not very many of us riding Icelandics in the United States; it was easy to excel, so I handily earned every award that was available. Riding was a pleasure, so it was just a matter of counting and turning in the hours. We, my husband and I, enjoyed introducing Icelandics to others and socializing with those who were riding Icelandics.

*Deb: Stephanie, I have to say that I certainly have benefitted from your love of Icelandics and your willingness to share them with people. And since I've known you these past few years, I have seen firsthand your advocacy for the breed. You claim to be a shy person, but in any setting, once horses are mentioned, you are off and running! The conversation comes easy for you if you are talking about your Icelandics. I have one last question for you today, Stephanie. If you could do it all over again, would you do anything differently?*

Stephanie: Well, if I could go back and do things differently, I sure would. I think anyone who would say they'd change nothing at all is pretty foolish, or conceited! But here in this setting I am sure you are referring to horses, Icelandics, riding or driving or breeding. I wish I had found them sooner. I wish I could have gotten into Icelandics sooner so that I could have had more time with them. And I would have ridden more of them. I don't mean that I would have ridden my horses more, I mean I would have ridden more horses. Of course they all have certain characteristics in common, such as that point-and-go attitude, but they are all so uniquely individual I wish I had known more of them.



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## WHY REGISTER YOUR HORSE WITH THE USIHC?

Photo by Andrea Brodie

### ***Proof of ownership***

Registering your horse is proof of ownership, like the title for your car. If the horse you buy is already registered with the USIHC, it means it is registered in the previous owner's name, both in the U.S. and in the worldwide database WorldFengur. In order to transfer ownership to you, the previous owner and you just need to sign the registration papers and send them to the USIHC Registrar. You will receive new papers—proving you are the new owner—in the mail shortly.

### ***Proof of pure breed***

Registration is proof that your horse is a purebred Icelandic, and that increases the value of your horse. All registered horses are DNA typed. This is especially important if your horse is a mare or stallion.

### ***Participation***

Some USIHC programs and events require the horse to be registered, such as the Pleasure Rider Program, the Ambassador Program, the World Championship tryouts, and inclusion in the USIHC Stallion book. Registration keeps the international Icelandic horse database, WorldFengur, accurate and complete. Not only stallions and mares, but also geldings need to be registered for a full offspring record. The Icelandic horse community and breeders worldwide depend on this source of information, a model that other breed organizations do not have.

### ***How to Register***

Registering your horse costs only between \$15 and \$50. A surcharge of \$25 is due for non-USIHC members. The Registry Rules and all forms needed are available at [www.icelandics.org](http://www.icelandics.org), the Congress website. Or contact the Registrar, Ásta Covert, at [registry@icelandics.org](mailto:registry@icelandics.org) or 866-929-0009.

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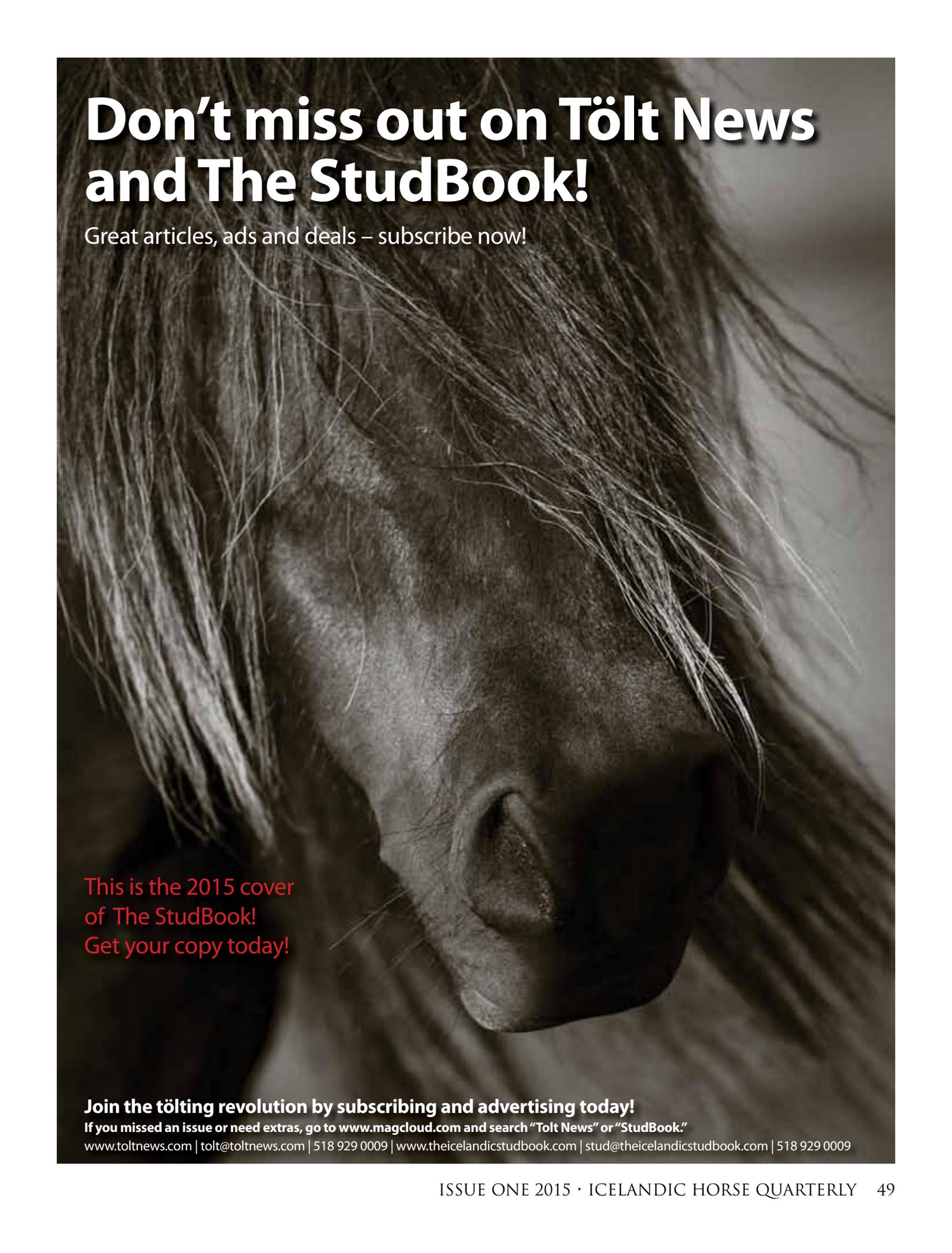
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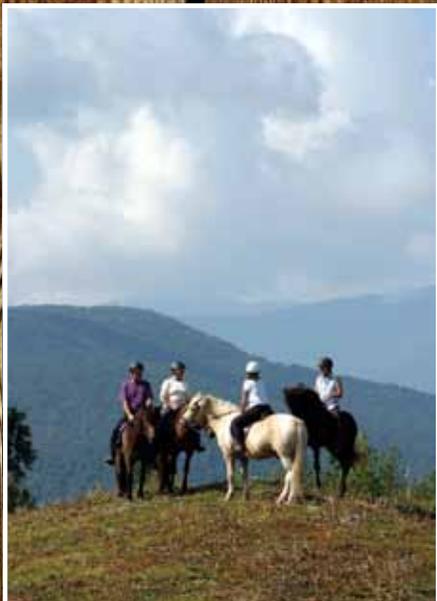
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