

Horse SHOWBIZ West Coast

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Attitude Check

WINNING IS EVERYTHING... OR IS IT?

By Linda Cooper

Learning Life Lessons From Horse Shows

There is much more to achieve from horse shows than just winning. Of course everyone likes to be winners, but in the horse show world, too much attention can be focused on the win and not enough about what can be gained from the discipline and training it takes to be a show rider.

PROPER COACHING IS KEY

With the proper coaching and encouragement from the trainer and parents, show experiences teach riders to become more confident people. At a show, the riders are "on stage". They are expected to perform what they have been practicing in front of a judge and spectators (parents and peers). This provides the opportunity for them to hone their riding abilities and to build their self confidence. In fact, each time they go into the ring, they come out a stronger, more confident rider. The goal is to have this increased confidence translate to other areas of their lives.

COACHES AND PARENTS CAN PROMOTE A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

Translating the horse show experience into positive tools that riders can apply to other areas of their lives is strongly dependent on their support system. This is where a solid relationship between the trainer, parent and rider comes into play. This relationship is a partnership with the ultimate goal being to foster the rider's growth, both on the horse and off. The coach/trainer is responsible for safety and rider development while parents provide the emotional support system for their son or daughter.

The trainer's job is to develop each individual horse and rider pair to their full potential, supporting them to work hard, instilling discipline, and challenging the riders based on their level of skill. The riders that are the most successful tend to be the ones that also push themselves. These riders have a strong support system and mature quickly as riders and as people. As a trainer, the focus is coaching the show rider to excel in the sport. Parents can help amplify their rider's performance by being a support system.

HOW PARENTS FOSTER LIFE SKILLS

As one of the key partners in the training relationship, parents have a huge influence on what the rider learns from showing. Here are some tips for parents to help their rider get the most out of the horse show experience.

•*Focus on the ride, not the win*

A parent's reaction to winning (or not) is really important to encouraging the rider's growth. The focus should not be on whether the rider won the class or not, it should be on "How did you ride?" How was your horse?" What did you do well?" "What do you think you will work on for next time?"

•*Teach your rider to take responsibility*

When your rider does not win, don't blame the judge, ring condition, course designer or anyone else. Help your rider to assess his performance and take responsibility for it.

•*Help your rider learn composure*

Everyone makes mistakes in life. Successful people pick their heads up and go on. When your rider makes a mistake (or several) in a class, encourage her to get herself together and go on to the next one.

•*Promote having fun*

Your rider is participating in horse shows because he/she enjoys horses. Encourage him/her to enjoy the entire show experience. Horse shows are a great place to bond with the horse and riding friends. And remember, first and foremost, the rider should be enjoying the whole horse show experience.

•*Tell the truth*

Do not tell your rider a round was good when it was not, but let him/her know something he/she did well.

•*Offer unconditional support*

No matter how your rider does in the horse show, let him/her know that you are supportive. Bring up a positive experience, "I am just so glad you stayed on/had a good time/rode well, honey", whether he/she had a great ride or a not so great ride.

Horse shows offer a great opportunity for riders to expand both in their horsemanship abilities and to establish life skills. Parents and coaches play a key part in this learning process. Focusing more on the lessons learned and less on the win is the key to getting the most out of the horse show experience. ♦