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PRACTICAL HORSEMAN EXTRA

Amanda Steege
and Loxley

Finesse Your FLAT CLASS

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FINESSE YOUR FLAT CLASS

At-home practice is key to a winning performance in the under-saddle class.

By Amanda Steege with Tricia Conahan
Photos by Amy K. Dragoo

If you hang around horse shows long enough, you'll hear this comment ringside: "You can't beat that daisy-cutter. He's going to win this flat class." But the truth is you don't always have to have the best mover to be competitive in the under-saddle class. Most judges are looking for the whole package: a horse who has good movement but is also obedient, alert, sound and has good manners. Does your horse look like he is a pleasure to ride? Are his ears up? Are his gaits balanced and his transitions smooth? How well you present your horse to dem-

onstrate these details can have a tremendous impact on the judge's ultimate decision.

Even if you're not aiming for a blue ribbon, doing your best in the under-saddle class is growing more important. Some of our top horse shows have transitioned from four to three jumping classes in a division. This makes the flat class all the more influential. Sometimes just being able to get a fifth- or sixth-place ribbon on the flat can give you the points needed to bring home the tricolor. So even if you don't ride the absolute best mover, learning to show off your horse on the flat is a valuable competition skill.

In this article I'll share some exercises to practice refining your flatting skills at home. Then I'll offer a few tips for making

Success in under-saddle classes requires a mix of homework, ring awareness and judicious displays of your horse's strengths. Here I'm practicing asking Loxley, a 16-year-old Anghauli-Saxon stallion, for a forward, relaxed, rhythmic trot while I look ahead around the arena to find the best place to show it off.



About Amanda Steege

Growing up, **Amanda Steege** was never far from a horse with both of her parents working as trainers and instructors in the hunter/jumper industry. The family owned Red Acre Farm, in Stow, Massachusetts.

As a Junior, Amanda campaigned her Small Junior Hunter, One In A Million (aka Spanky), to great success. Coached by her father and Bill Cooney (and still riding Spanky), Amanda won the 1991 Massachusetts Medal Finals and competed in the USEF National Hunter Seat Medal Finals

and the ASPCA Maclay National Championships the following two years. She graduated magna cum laude from Boston College and started her own business, Ashmeadow Farm, in 2001.

Amanda has been the World Champion Hunter Rider for the northeast region for several years. She and her clients have won numerous championships at the Devon Horse Show, The Hampton Classic, the Middleburg Classic and the Indoor hunter/jumper circuit. She runs her farm with her longtime boyfriend, Tim Delovich, splitting time between Ocala, Florida, and Califon, New Jersey.

Exercise 1: Mock Flat Class



In my pretend under-saddle class, I enter the ring and immediately look for the “judge” standing outside the rail. Then I ask Loxley to head down the quarterline toward her in a nice balanced trot.



As the mock class progresses, I repeatedly look toward the judge to check where I am in her field of view.



Next, I ask my judge to stand in the center of the ring, so I can fine-tune my awareness of her in that location, asking Loxley to perform his best when I sense her eyes on me.

the most of your ride at the actual competition. Together, these critical tools can help you optimize your chances in a flat class, regardless of whether or not your horse is the best mover on the planet. They'll help you and your horse stand out from the pack—and maybe even beat that daisy-cutter!

Stand Still!

One simple skill you can tackle at home is training your horse to stand nicely in the line. Take breaks in the middle of your rides and ask him to stand in the center of the arena. Keep some peppermints in your pocket and reward him when he stands quietly. Gradually, over many sessions, lengthen the amount of time you ask him to stand still.

Stage a Mock Flat Class

Nothing beats practice. A great way to rehearse the show-ring scenario is to stage a mock under-saddle class at home with five or

six friends. This is a terrific opportunity to see how your horse will behave in company and for you to practice your hack-class technique. Designate one of your friends to be the judge, standing in a typical judge location and calling out instructions to the riders.

In under-saddle classes it is important to get seen early and often and by yourself. To do that, you must know where the judge is and where you should be in relation to him to be best seen. The most common places for a judge to stand for a hack class are in the center of the ring or just outside of the ring (usually in a judge's box on the long side of the ring). Practice simulating both those possibilities in your mock class.

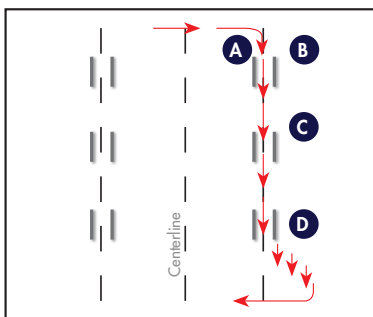
You also need to recognize the places in the ring where you can make adjustments that perhaps you'd rather the judge *not* see (shorten your reins, balance your horse, etc.). Practicing this in your mock class—both from the rider's and judge's perspective—will make a big difference.

Start with your judge standing on the side of the ring outside the rail. Give your horse a short warm-up first to make sure he is paying attention. Then start the class just as you would at a show, entering the ring through the in-gate. As you do so, tracking to the left (as all flat classes begin), practice putting your eyes on the judge. Notice where she is looking. The best place for you to be seen is usually on the quarterline—the track on the long side of the ring midway between its center and the rail—and, in competition, ideally with no other horse around you. So pick up a nice trot immediately, then ride down the quarterline with your horse in balance, setting an even, consistent pace.

After you pass the judge and enter the corner, realize that this is where she can see you the least. It's a good place to make any necessary adjustments. Ask your judge to call out when you pass out of her normal peripheral line of sight (as if she were watching other horses on the quarterline) and again when you come back into her natural zone of attention.

Next, have your judge move to the center of the ring and repeat both steps of the exercise. Where in the ring can she see

Exercise 2: Maximize the Quarterline



Place a series of poles on the ground to build a chute along each quarterline.

- A. Make an early, balanced turn
- B. Straighten before entering the chute
- C. Stay even in your seat, legs and reins
- D. Leg-yield to the rail



After making a smooth turn to the quarterline, I straighten Loxley and look down the track through the center of each pair of poles.



I maintain this straightness all the way down the chute by staying even in my seat, legs and rein contact.



As we exit the chute, I leg-yield back to the rail by closing my inside leg and opening my outside hand a bit while keeping a slight inside bend.



If your horse doesn't move off your leg when you ask for leg-yield, tap him with your crop behind your leg.



Next, I repeat the exercise at the canter, asking Loxley to move off my inside leg as we exit the chute. Having practiced this already at the walk and trot, he is happy to oblige!

you best and least? Note that in a real class you might choose either the quarterline or the outside track, depending on the amount of horse traffic.

During this mock flat-class session, take turns playing judge. Get off your horse and stand on the side of the ring, pretending you are judging the other people riding. Take note of where you can see them well. Hold both arms out in a V shape to frame your optimal sight zone. Then identify your blind spots: Where can't you see? Next, try this from the judging position in the center of the ring. Putting yourself in the judge's shoes will teach you a lot about what he sees and when he sees it.

Maximize the Quarterline

In a hack class, you want to maximize your time on the quarterlines of the ring, with your horse straight from his nose to his tail for as many strides as you can. To do this, you need to execute the corners correctly. Here's a great exercise for practicing that:

Place a chute of poles on the ground along each quarterline of

the ring. How many poles you use and how far apart you space them depends on the size of your ring. You may want to put one pair of poles at each end of the quarterline, then another set in the middle to create a straight chute that you can identify visually.

You can begin this exercise at the trot, but if you have difficulties, go back to the walk until both you and your horse have mastered the basics. Start by tracking right. Trot through the corner with an active, engaged pace, bending your horse slightly to the inside. As you exit the corner, make the early turn toward the chute of poles by opening your inside right rein and using your outside left leg to push your horse over. Be careful not to lean in on this turn.

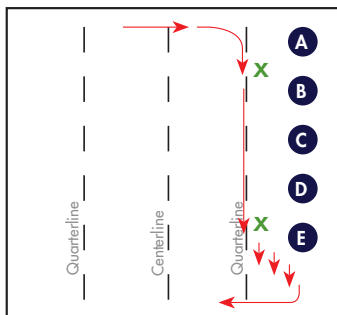
Once you are on the quarterline, your goal is to have your horse as straight as possible. Use two reins and two legs evenly to drive him straight down the chute of poles. Make sure you are sitting evenly in the saddle so he can stay evenly balanced as well.

Aim to leave the quarterline and get back to the rail just before you approach the next corner. As you exit the chute, move

Exercise 3: Show off Your Horse's Movement

To practice lengthening the trot down the quarterline, I set up a marker on either end of it (X), then add a pair of ground poles to help me double-check my straightness.

- A. Make an early balanced turn
- B. Close legs and hip angle, soften reins
- C. Maintain trot lengthening to second marker
- D. Sit tall, close fingers on reins and collect stride
- E. Leg-yield to rail



After making a smooth balanced turn onto the quarterline, I straighten Loxley. Then as we pass the marker, I close my legs to ask him to lengthen his stride.



I soften my rein contact and close my hip angle slightly to encourage him to move forward freely, demonstrating a beautiful balanced trot in the relaxed frame that judges love to see.



When we reach the marker at the end of the quarterline, I stretch my upper body tall over my hips, sit slightly deeper in the saddle and close my fingers on the reins while still squeezing my legs to ask him to collect his stride before initiating the leg-yield.

your horse to the rail by asking him to leg-yield to the left. Use your inside (right) leg to push him left while keeping a slight inside bend with your right rein and opening your outside (left) rein a bit. This will get you back out to the rail just before you enter the corner, and that will set you on the best track to navigate the next quarterline.

If your horse doesn't move off your leg, try using more pressure or move your leg back an inch or two to get a better reaction, still keeping your heel down. You can also use a little tap with the crop behind your leg. Keep your leg on the horse at the same time you tap. Remember: The crop backs up your leg; it doesn't replace it.

Once you have mastered this exercise in both directions, try

it at canter. Use the same aids at all gaits.

Show off Your Horse's Movement

To show off your horse's trot, ask him to lengthen his stride down the quarterlines, then collect and rebalance him on the corners. Practicing this at home will teach him to do this seamlessly while responding to your body position as part of the aids. Place an object—a cone, flowerpot, etc.—at the beginning of the quarterline and another at the end to mark where to make your transitions.

To practice this exercise, pick up a normal trot and ride through the corner just as you did in the quarterline exercise. Your horse should be balanced and ahead of your leg. As you track onto the quarterline, relax your biceps, thinking of your

Don't Undermine the Trot

Trying too hard at the trot is a common mistake in hack classes. Sometimes you will see a rider ask the horse to lengthen the trot by using a heavy driving seat with an open hip angle. But the driving seat is counterproductive, as it can make the horse lift his head and drop his back, which creates a quick, choppy step rather than the desired long, loose step. And if the rider lands too heavily in the post, it can make the horse crabby or pin his ears.

To address this, do lots of work at home in the two-point position. This will give you the leg strength necessary to keep the right position even with a horse who is reluctant to go forward. Then, when you return to normal posting trot, use the same position for the "up" part of your post as when you were in two-point, especially when asking your horse to lengthen his stride. When he goes forward, you want him to stretch his neck out and down, reach up through his back and take a nice step through his shoulder. Being light in the saddle will allow him to do this.

When you come "down" in your post, slide your hips back in the saddle an inch or two and slightly close your hip angle. Think of landing in your thigh and heel, not letting yourself land heavily in the saddle.

arms being elastic. Close your hip angle slightly and add some leg. You are asking for just a small step up in speed, but you want your horse to visibly extend his stride, relax his neck and lengthen his frame from nose to tail.

Your goal is to keep this frame from the moment you enter the quarterline until the moment you leave it to enter the next corner. This is your horse's opportunity to shine!

At the end of the quarterline, stretch back up with your shoulders over your hips and return to a slightly deeper seat. Keep squeezing with your legs, close your fingers on the reins and ask your horse to slow his gait and shorten his frame. Continue posting. Once he has collected his stride, begin your leg-yield back to the rail.

Some horses get strung out or on their forehand riding the length of the ring. Practicing this collection in the corners presents an ideal opportunity to rebalance your horse. You can do it at all three gaits.

Do Your Pre-Class Prep

With all of this homework under your belt, you should feel more prepared to perform your best in the ring. Keep in mind that presentation really counts. Your horse should be well-groomed with

tight braids and a clean, white, properly fitted saddle pad. Your clothes should fit well and your boots should be polished to a high sheen. You both should look like you are "in it to win it."

As you plan the rest of your hack-class strategy, think through all the details that will play a role in your success, including your warm-up. Get on at least 15 minutes before your class to warm up your horse in the schooling area, especially if it's the first class of the day. Just do a little walk, trot, canter; loosen up his muscles and make sure he is in front of your leg.

Before you enter the ring, notice where the judge is standing and decide what you will do during the first few minutes as the class fills. You can't control the size of the class or who you compete against. But you can control, to some extent, the picture that the judge sees. So plan your strategy ahead of time.

Connect with the Judge

Once you're in the ring, the first thing to realize is that it's not the judge's job to discover you; it's *your* job to present your horse to the judge. Especially in a crowded flat class, judges are looking for the winner the second you walk in the gate, long before the class has filled. So use that opportunity to get seen early and by yourself.

Try to make a few passes by the judge at your horse's best gait to create a great first impression.

Once the class has started, look for opportunities to be seen by the judge when your horse is at his best and to minimize the view of him when you are correcting or rebalancing his gaits.

Remember that in a hunter hack class the judge is looking for light contact with your horse's mouth. That means the tight frame used in equitation classes is not appropriate. Get your horse in a balanced gait with impulsion, then soften your hands and let him stretch his neck out a little bit. He should feel long from nose to tail and loose in his back. But be cautious not to create a really loose, loopy rein; there should still be light contact with your horse's mouth.

In a typical flat class, you will be asked to walk, trot and canter in both directions. (The U.S. Equestrian Federation rules also permit the judge to call for a hand gallop, but that is rarely requested these days.) But this is not Simon Says—it is more important to do a nice transition than to do it immediately. You can take up to four or five steps to prepare your horse for a smooth up or down transition. And in a crowded ring, sometimes waiting those few seconds can help put more space between your horse and the one ahead of you. So take your time and plan it out.

Keep thinking! If your horse is not behaving or is not in the correct balance or pace, consider avoiding the quarterline and instead find your way to the outside track, where you might be somewhat hidden behind another horse while you correct the issue.

When the judge calls to line up, try to end up in the center of the line, once again making sure that the judge can easily find you. Sometimes the judge is scrambling to pin the class at the end. So this is another opportunity to be seen—or at least not forgotten—before he makes a final decision! 🍀



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HORSEMANSHIP 101

Arm yourself with the knowledge that will take your riding to the next level.

By Debbie Stephens
Photos by Susan J. Stickle

Whether you compete or just ride for fun, you can raise your horsemanship to a higher level by learning more about your horse, your sport and yourself. Successful riding is all about creating the best possible partnership with your horse, both at home and at shows. In this article, I describe my methods for gathering and tracking all the pertinent information that might affect your horse's health, happiness and performance. Then in an article on *PracticalHorsemanMag.com*, I describe my strategy for preparing both your horse and yourself for competition. In a second online article, I also share some helpful tips for focusing your mind and arriving at the ring ready to ride your best every time.

Good horsemanship is about knowing your horse inside and out. The more information you can gather and analyze about his health and well-being, the earlier you can identify and solve problems. I make careful notes about every change in my horses' daily routines.

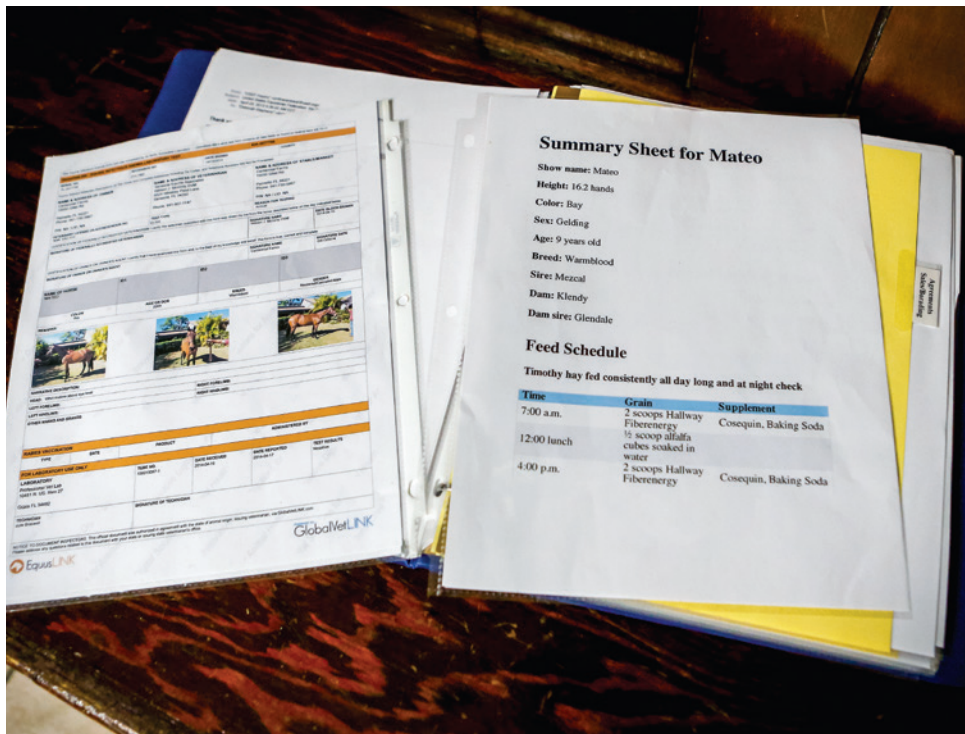
There's No "I" in Team

The better you know your horse, the better you can perform together as a team no matter what level you are. Riding is like pairs figure skating, only much harder since our horses can't talk to us. We love them so much, but we can't ask them what they're thinking or how they're feeling. Instead, to develop the same kind of fluid, connected partnership that a pair of skaters demonstrates on the ice, you have to compile as much information about your horse as you can. By learning his history, monitoring his daily routine and tracking his health, behavior and performance, you can learn to predict what methods will and won't work for him in the future.

Keeping a record book is one of the most powerful tools for getting to know your horse inside and out. Sometimes the tiniest details, such as a minor cough or a thrown shoe, can lead to major changes in his performance. We all think we'll remember these details later, but we usually don't—especially if the cause and effect span a long period of time. With good records to look back on, you'll be surprised at how much you learn about your horse.

Even if your horse is boarded at a full-care facility, get involved in his daily care. In addition to maintaining a record book, keep a diary and checklist like the ones I describe below and research every unfamiliar horse-related topic you come across. Most importantly, *ask questions* of the people helping you care for your horse, whether it's your trainer, a barn manager, your farrier—not in a confrontational or accusatory way but always with the express purpose of better informing yourself. As the saying goes, the best consumer is an educated consumer.

Tap into today's technology, too. Anybody from age 8 to 80 can find useful resources on the Internet. If you're on the latter end of that spectrum, ask your grandkids for help. I Google anything I



ABOVE: Include everything you know about your horse's breeding, background and daily routine—including his feeding schedule—in his record book. You never know what little details might be useful later on.

RIGHT: In my barn, each horse has his own record book tracking his individual history and care.

don't know. Be sure to stick to reputable sources like sport/breed organizations, veterinary schools and extension services. You can also go to www.PracticalHorsemanMag.com for reliable info on most horse-related topics. I also take advantage of high-tech devices and software solutions that can help me monitor my horses. For two examples, see "High-Tech Solutions for Horse Owners" on page 12.

The Record Book

Create your record book out of a regular binder, with section dividers and added clear sleeves for storing important documents and even those that may seem non-



essential but might be useful later. Make the following sections:

1. Your horse's history. Fill this section with everything you know about your horse's basic physical characteristics and life to date: age, sex, height, color, markings, breed, original name, lineage, date ac-



Good nutrition is a huge part of your horse's well-being. I not only track what and when I feed my horses, but I also monitor how quickly they clean up their meals. A sudden change in appetite can be a sign of illness or discomfort.

quired, name and contact info of previous owner(s), past performances, etc. If you don't know much about your horse's past, try searching for his name (or tattoo or brand, if he has one) online. Many breed and sport organizations now have searchable databases available to the public.

2. Nutrition. The saying "You are what you eat" is as true of horses as it is of humans. Unfortunately, our horses are getting as much junk food as today's average Americans. Instead of allowing them their most natural diet of 24/7 grass, we load them up with high-calorie, high-fat,

low-fiber feeds without knowing why or if that's what they really need. As a result, many exhibit some of the same obesity problems and unruly behavior that we see in kids these days. Just like the nation's schools are starting to wake up to this phenomenon and get rid of vending machines, we need to pay closer attention to what we're feeding our horses.

Start by clipping the label off a bag of your horse's regular feed. Every bag is required by law to have a label detailing all of the nutritional information you need to know about its contents. Put the label in one of the sleeves of your record book. Then ask yourself (or your trainer or barn manager, if you're not the person selecting the feed) why exactly your horse is getting this particular feed.

Next, record in your book how much grain your horse is fed and at what times of the day. Calculate exactly how many pounds of feed he eats by measuring a full scoop (or coffee can or whatever other container you use to measure his meals) of grain and weighing it on a scale.

Also take note of what type of eater he is. Does he clean all of his meal up quickly or pick at it over time? If you're not there to see for yourself, ask the barn staff. Then keep track of any changes in his appetite, noting the specific details and date in your daily journal (more on that later).

Do the same with his hay. Find out exactly what kind it is—timothy, alfalfa, mixed, etc.—and where it came from. Write all of this in your record book, along with the amounts and times that he is given hay.

If your horse receives any supplements, take note of the brands, ingredients, feeding times and amounts. If you don't know why he gets them, ask your trainer.

Finally, note in your book how your horse gets his water. Does he have an automatic waterer in his stall or buckets? If the latter, how many? How often is the water changed? What type of water container is in his pasture? Try to track how much water he drinks every day. Dehydration is the number-one cause of colic.

3. Turnout. Include in your notebook

HORSES	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
1 Bunny Hop	99.9	99.8	99.7	99.9		99.7	
2 Buckle	99.7	99.8	99.9	99.8		99.9	
3 Qjet	99.6	99.7	99.5	99.8		99.8	
4 Dryden			100.1	99.9			
5 Mikeo	99.9	99.8	99.9	99.8		99.9	
6 Jesse							
7 Sanger						99.7	
8							
9							
10							
11							

ABOVE: Chart his temperature over time and save those records to refer back to later. Even slight changes may indicate a brewing problem.

RIGHT: Check your horse's temperature daily, both at home and on the road.



all the details about your horse's turnout—when and where he goes out, for how long and with what other horses. Is he on grass or sand? Is his grazing supplemented with hay? Be sure to take note of any seasonal changes, too. For example, does he switch from night turnout in the summer to day turnout in the winter? Also record what he wears when turned out—boots, blanket, sheet, fly mask, fly spray, etc.

4. Shoeing/foot care. Another saying that always holds true is “no foot, no horse.” Just the way a blister on your foot can make you walk differently and create other problems elsewhere in your body, such as knee or back pain, even minor hoof problems can lead to serious performance problems. Keep track of how frequently he is shod (or trimmed, if he's barefoot). Also enter in your notebook his farrier's name as well as the details about exactly how he shoes your horse. If you don't know why your horse is shod the way he is, *ask!*

This is one of those areas where extra research will really pay off in the long run. If you don't know what thrush is, for example, look it up. Learning what measures to take to try to prevent it and what signs to look for if your horse has it can help to avoid serious problems.

5. Veterinary care. Even if your

High-Tech Solutions For Horse Owners

I'm always looking for new ways to serve my horses better. One software program I helped develop and love using is Stable Secretary. It's a barn-management app that tracks all of the important records I describe in this article plus billing records for your service providers.

Another wonderful high-tech solution is StallWatch. It's a portable video-surveillance system that allows 24/7 remote viewing and archives 30 days of stored video. This adds one more level of monitoring to your horse-care routine, providing peace of mind.



Putting a camera in your horse's stall is an invaluable way to monitor him during times when he's not acting himself and to alert you to emergencies, such as him getting cast against a wall.



Frequently check the cleanliness and condition of all of your equipment. Your horse's comfort and safety—as well as yours—depend on it.

trainer takes care of scheduling veterinary visits, it's very important for you to work one-on-one with your veterinarian. Stay on top of what's happening with your horse's health. When is he vaccinated and what is he vaccinated for? If he's an older horse, talk to your vet about whether it may be safe to decrease the frequency

of his vaccinations. Also ask about his deworming schedule. What types of dewormer is he given and why? I highly recommend collecting fecal samples to determine exactly what type of parasite load your horse has so you can tailor his deworming program appropriately.

Put all of this information in your

notebook. Also record every medication your horse receives and what he receives it for. If he gets a periodic dose of phenylbutazone, ask why—again, not to second-guess your trainer but to inform yourself for future purposes.

6. Tack. In this section, note exactly what kind of bridle, bit, saddle, girth, pads and legwear you use on your horse. Describe them in detail and find out why each particular item is suitable for your horse. If you're not sure what's best for him, do additional research to explore your options. For example, I always recommend using a relatively wide girth (this is much more comfortable for horses than a narrow girth), short enough so when attached to the saddle, there are extra billet holes above it on both sides.

How does the saddle fit your horse? Does he have especially high withers or a large barrel? This is another excellent opportunity to educate yourself. Note all you learn in the record book.

Include your general tack-care routine here, too. For example, do you wash the saddle pads (or thinner sheets placed under them, which many people use for convenience and cleanliness) every time you ride to prevent dermatitis? Do you keep the saddle pads separate from other horses' gear so there's no risk of spreading skin diseases?

7. General care. Include any other aspects of your horse's care that you can think of in this section. What type of bedding is used in his stall? What is the flooring underneath the bedding? Are there rubber mats covering a cement floor? If so, what kind are they? What is the normal frequency and consistency of his manure? Since horses can't throw up, one of the next best indicators of gastrointestinal distress is a change in manure.

Also be sure to note your horse's individual preferences. For example, how does he like being bathed? I often see people spraying their horses in the face and I wonder, "How would you feel if someone did that to you?" Most horses prefer gentle bathing with a sponge and minimal soap.

Daily or Near-Daily Diary

Next, create a section in your notebook for a daily or near-daily log of your horse's life. This is where you'll track all of the minor details of his exercise program, health and behavior. Horses thrive on regular routine. Your diary will help you stick to a good routine and identify changes in it that may be affecting him in ways you might not otherwise have realized.

Each time you exercise your horse, make a few brief notes about what you did—jumped, flattened, trail rode, etc. How long was your session? Was it a structured lesson? Did anything unusual happen? For example, was he especially spooky or did he have trouble with something in particular, like picking up one lead?

Also note in this journal section anything significant about his health and care—changes in his appetite, thrown shoes, coughing, heat cycles (if you have a mare), changes in temperature, etc. I highly recommend taking your horse's temperature daily. This is an exceptionally useful tool for identifying ailments early.

Note in this diary, too, anything that you did differently in your horse's routine. For example, did you properly dry him out before returning him to his stall? Be honest! This is for your future reference.

The Checklist

In this section of the notebook, list all of the tack and equipment items that should be monitored for safety and cleanliness. Include the stitching on your girth billets, stirrup leathers and bridle. Because stirrup leathers tend to stretch (particularly the left one because you use it for mounting), check that the two leathers are still even in length. If they're not, swap the one on the left for the one on the right. Also include a cleanliness check for your horse's sheets, blankets, boots and polo wraps, which can cause dermatitis and summer sores if not washed frequently.

If you're not sure what else should go on this checklist, consult your trainer. Then plan to go through all of the items on it biweekly.

Connect the Dots

As you accumulate and document all of this information about your horse, you will begin to notice patterns in his care, health and performance. Say he starts refusing a flower box that he never had a problem jumping before. If you take a look back through your diary, you may notice that he threw a shoe a few weeks previously, which may have caused foot soreness that's making him reluctant to jump. Or perhaps your mare behaves dif-

ferently during her heat cycle, in which case, you can consult your veterinarian to see if hormone-therapy treatment might be beneficial.

The more knowledge you have about your horse, the more explanations you'll discover for his behavior—both the good and the bad. This will help to guide you in future decisions. By taking responsibility for his care, you will become a better partner to him. I guarantee you'll be pleased with the results. 🐾

*Show jumper **Debbie Stephens** has graced the grand-prix circuit for more than three and a half decades. Her boundless energy, work ethic and dedication have carried her through many ups and downs during her career. She grew up with opportunities that all horse-crazy girls dream of: great horses, entry to the top shows and even a private trainer hired to teach her and show her family's horses. That idyllic life ended when her father died, leaving behind substantial debts. The horses had to be sold—but Debbie never gave up her dreams. After graduating from Syracuse University with a degree in sociology, she took a job working for New York horseman Ted Ralston, doing everything from mucking stalls and braiding to schooling, showing and foxhunting.*

Years later, after surviving a failed marriage and a terrifying barn fire (she led 19 horses to safety), Debbie started Centennial Farm with her friend Bill Glass. She still credits the support of many legendary horsepeople for helping her make a name for herself training and competing jumpers. She won her first grand prix in 1980 in Cleveland on the gray stallion Abdullah, who went on to win team gold and individual silver medals in the 1984 Olympics with Conrad Homfeld. In 1982, Debbie set the ladies' outdoor high-jump record by clearing 7-foot-8 with Spindletop Rocky Racoon. Since then, she has won countless grands prix and represented the U.S. in many international competitions. Her long list of successful mounts includes Volan, VIP, Poor Richard, Texas T, Blind Date, Don Carlos, Pacifica, Chappie, Callaway 4 and Cosequin's CEO, among many others.

In 1984, Debbie met her second husband, Steve Stephens, whom she calls "the love of my life." She was fortunate to have him watching ringside when she fell at a water jump in 2003. Temporarily paralyzed, she might have drowned had he not rushed into the ring to pull her out of the water. Once a fellow grand prix jumper, Steve branched out to course designing, jump manufacturing and horse-show management. He was the assistant course designer for Bert de Némethy at the 1984 Olympics and the co-designer for the 2008 Olympics with Leopoldo Palacios. He also received the U.S. Hunter Jumper Association Lifetime Achievement award and was inducted into the Show Jumping Hall of Fame.

Debbie and Steve are now based at Centennial Equestrian Farm in Tampa Bay, Florida. Debbie continues to teach, train and hold her own in the grand prix ring.

A woman in a dark equestrian jacket and helmet is adjusting the bridle of a brown horse. The horse's head is in sharp focus, showing its eyes and the details of the bridle. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting. A diagonal light blue line runs from the top left to the bottom right of the image.

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