



Teaching Techniques

SUMMER HORSE ACTIVITIES

By *Deanna Morono*

When the frigid winter weather and soggy spring rains yield to the boiling heat of summer, CHA facilities across the country have to adjust to the temperature changes. Depending on the region, the weather comes in multiple forms: dry heat, humidity, cool mountain air or off-shore breezes.

So how do you deal with the heat? Equestrian facilities tend to adjust their schedules and activities based on what resources are available, but the overall consensus is to avoid strenuous work during the hottest part of the day.

"In the afternoons, riding is nearly nonexistent," Darla Rider, director of CHA Region 8, says. Early mornings and late evenings are the best times to ride. Having a covered arena is definitely a plus, but the weather will still get hot. Many sites have indoor arenas with cooling systems. Jo-Anne Young, director of CHA Region 5, says that one of the best ways to avoid the heat and sticky humidity is to have an insulated indoor arena in which you can "manipulate the temperatures manually." She also suggests setting up large fans that can blow down the aisles to keep the horses from over-heating.

Teddy Franke, director of CHA Region 11, has a different take on the summer months. In Alaska,

the temperature is ideally in the 80s, sometimes 90s. "Heat is not an issue," he says. "Because summer months are shorter, people tend to spend a lot of time on horses whenever they can." Likewise, according to Jo-Anne, places near mountains, like Houghton College Equestrian Center in New York, have cooler weather and frequent rainfall. Although they don't have to worry about heat, they're not immune from the flies that return with the change in weather. "The bugs come out, and they are nasty," Jo-Anne says. "You also have to be careful of critters, like possums, which carry diseases." (See *On the Rail* on page 7 for fly control tips)

No matter the location, summer means heat and sunshine, and Lori Hall-McNary, the director of CHA Region 10, says that training on heat prevention for both horses and people is critical for staff and volunteers at any facility. However, if you don't use a public facility, Terry Williams-Jones, the director of CHA Region 4, gives this advice: "Whatever you can do in the heat is what your horse can tolerate." If you need water, your horse needs water. Don't forget about the horse that's working just as hard as you!

After you understand your location and weather patterns, you are prepared to deal with the heat. So what are some fun, less-strenuous activities to do with a horse?

Camps thrive during the summer months. Whether you go to a day camp or an overnight camp or choose a camp specializing in English or Western, there's a facility for you. Most camps have programs for kids and adults, from novice to experienced riders. Some accredited CHA facilities and CHA

certified instructors use the CHA levels in the Composite Manual of Horsemanship, and once riders have met those riding skills, they are put to the test in fun, safe ways by various team games and activities, depending on their level.

Mounted activities

According to Lori, many camps have play days that include plenty of water activities, including the wet hat race. There are a few variations, but the overall gist is that a rider who is holding baseball cap or bandana walks, trots, canters or hand-gallops (based on experience of rider) down to a person standing next to a barrel on the other side of it when the horse come down. The rider hands the cap to the person at the barrel who then dips the hat in a bucket of water, puts on the hat and runs back to the finish line.

Another standard team game is the mounted drill team. Riders must complete choreographed maneuvers, either with or without music. These drills can be as basic as following one another along a set course at a walk or as advanced as pairing up and moving throughout the arena at a canter while performing special movements and tricks.

Nearly every facility provides trail rides, a great way to escape the monotony of an arena and be outdoors. With cool breezes and shade from trees along the trail, trail rides are great for everyone—beginners to advanced. Overnight camping trips with your horse is another activity recommended as a "must try experience." Or, if you're up in Alaska, Teddy suggests taking a two to three day packing trip through the mountains and rely on the horses to haul the gear.

For early morning riders who want a little more action with their horse, cross-country courses are a blast to learn to navigate. Obstacle courses are a fun way to teach riders how to communicate with their horses. Or some camps offer vaulting classes, which combines gymnastics or dancing on horseback and there is always English jumping classes or Western cow herding events.

Un-mounted activities

A simple and very enjoyable un-mounted activity is grooming and grazing on the lead rope. “Kids just love it,” Terry says, “and there’s no programming involved.” Just make sure you have a designated area for the grazing so the horses know when they are allowed to graze and when they need to lead correctly without pulling the kids to the nearest blade of grass. A lot of kids who come to camp don’t get to be around horses when they’re at home. Some camps offer the chance for kids to “adopt” a horse for the summer. Kids are responsible for catching, grooming, feeding and cleaning up after their horse, as well as practicing riding on it. This experience allows kids to understand the huge responsibility of caring for a horse. “Kids do better coming to camps as opposed to just taking lessons once a week,” Darla says. “Camps are more intensive and extensive.”

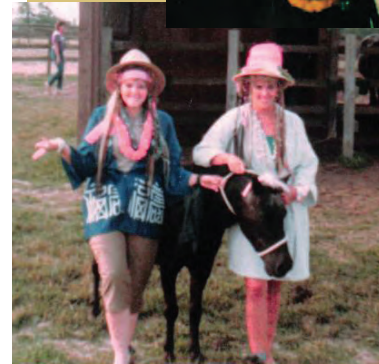
According to Terry, a strange and entertaining activity to do with horses and kids is to have a horse marriage ceremony. The kids spend all day bathing, grooming and decorating the horse couple. Then they invite the whole facility to come to the official ceremony. Bell boots are used as rings and guests line up to sign a guest book placed on

the manure spreader. Carrots and apples make great wedding gifts!

Some facilities offer the chance for volunteers to work with the disabled or with military veterans (such as the Program Member Highlight facility – Horses4Heroes featured on page 6). Volunteers assist with providing rides for therapy and counseling. Some programs are specifically for teaching kids who want to be instructors; some programs specialize in teaching about equine first aid. And when the heat is too much to handle, let the horses cool off in a shady stall with a fan and take a swim. Watch horse-related movies in the comfort of an air-conditioned room and learn about parts of the horse and horse breeds. Don’t let the summer heat spoil your enjoyment for horses. The best part about the summer is the weather – a delightful break from rain and snow. Take the opportunity to become part of a group of riders. Explore woods by horseback; take lessons to improve your seat; or spend quality time grooming your horse in the sun. Find a camp near you and just get involved. According to Jo-Anne, camps have “high quality instruction and professional facilities,” some of which have thousands of dollars of equipment and supplies for campers to use. When you’re part of a facility like that, there’s the pleasure of camaraderie in being part of a team, making friends and just being around horses. 🐾

About the Author: Deanna Morono is an American Horse Publications intern attending college as a senior at Asbury College. She hails from the foothills of Northern California and hopes to combine her love of horses and writing in her career.

Photos provided by Terry Williams Jones



Mounted Activities:

1. Games: Relay races; drill team; Red Light, Green Light
2. Trail rides, camping/packing trips
3. Cross country tracks
4. Cow herding/team penning
5. Vaulting
6. Drill team

Un-mounted Activities:

1. Horse weddings
2. Bathing and grooming
3. Learning about parts of the horse, horse health and care
4. Mucking stalls and cleaning tack
5. Volunteering to help specialized programs
6. Attending clinics, shows and rodeos