

## **Eight Things Horseback Riders Are Sick of Hearing and How a True Equestrian Would Respond (Rebuttal to 8 Things Horseback Riders Are Sick of Hearing)**

Here's the original article: [http://theodysseyonline.com/umw/8-things-horseback-riders-are-sick-of-hearing/285973?fb\\_comment\\_id=954049837998099\\_955071151229301&comment\\_id=955071151229301](http://theodysseyonline.com/umw/8-things-horseback-riders-are-sick-of-hearing/285973?fb_comment_id=954049837998099_955071151229301&comment_id=955071151229301)

*Listen and observe before you judge.*

I saw an article recently from a young woman who complained about how non-horsey folks see the horsey world. I spent most of the article shaking my head and confirming that I need to retire in another country because the Millennials are going to lead this great nation into ruin. It's easy to poke fun of the ignorant, but much harder to educate the masses. I should know. I'm a teacher and an equestrian. Paulo Coelho alluded to it best in his novel *The Alchemist*: we are all teachers without realizing it.

1. Any and all sexual innuendos.



Have you seen the abs on some of the male dressage riders! Many of them could put Channing Tatum to shame—in the saddle and out of it. Have you seen the legs on some of the lady riders? As equestrians, those who are in 'fit' and 'on the muscle,' we look good (myself excluded)! Go ahead and look; and like the horses we ride, tell us how gorgeous we are! (*PHOTO: A rider forgot his costume for a specials class and came up with a new one—Adam, the first man. Check out his video on YouTube.*)

2. "Have you had your horse since it was a pony?"



Nothing wrong with intelligence, having it or using it. In this Dark Age of Intellect, it is vital that any body with an abundance of brain wave activity share so that one day these alleged digital natives may find true enlightenment. It's every Human's obligation to help dispel the darkness of ignorance. Thus, a true equestrian would educate the non-horsey by replying, "No, no, ponies are like Miniature Pinschers. Smaller versions of horses. I own a Thoroughbred, and I can barely see over his back." Would you do anything less for a kindergartner who mistook your Guinea pig for a mouse?

3. "Can I ride your horse sometime?"



It's not an invitation I offer to everyone who utters the question, but more often than not, my reply is, "Absolutely!" My horse is a successful show horse, an ex-racehorse with dressage and pleasure horse experience. As an aging rider, I know kids who can't afford the privilege to be offended, so I let them ride and show my horse. For the uninitiated, I can ensure a very pleasant experience, negating those horror stories. Because of this, I have brought dozens of people into the horsey world, including a show jumper and two avid fox hunters. *(PHOTO: Kirsten Hayes wanted to give dressage a try. She rode Skip the Crowd for the first time ever for 5 minutes before her first class and earned second place out of a class of 9 with a score of 69%.)*

4. "I rode a horse one time on vacation."



Unlike some Millennials, I am no self-absorbed narcissist, so I find genuine joy in listening to other people's stories of their life adventures. I listen attentively and ask questions. "Where did you go? Where did you ride? Were the animals well tended? Was there a beach?" And then, "Let me tell you about the time I rode an Andalusian stallion in Spain. It was glorious!" (PHOTO: *The author riding the Andalusian stallion Dil in the Spanish Walk under the watchful eye of Rocio Jurado, assistant trainer at Royal Hipica Center, Cadiz, Spain. They have a tack shop, restaurant, and weekly exhibitions! A must-see for horsey and non-horsey people!*)

5. "The one time I rode a horse, it tried to buck me."



My responses are typical of a teacher. "Sadness! Why would someone put you on a horse who misbehaves? Why on earth were you on without a saddle or even halter?" Having ridden and competed for over 30 years, I've gone to many a barn and ridden many a horse who has had a bucking fetish, and these are show horses! The culprit in many of these horror stories is an old plow horse or ancient pony who has learned through repetition that by depositing the human on the ground, they will be returned to the pasture to eat grass, or if they dump the excess weight on their backs, they will get back to the barn faster. Seriously, real equestrians have been there, done that. To a newcomer, that happy dance or gig in the crisp morning air is terrifying, as frightening as a new driver merging onto a busy interstate highway

for the very first time. (PHOTO: Allison Wagner having her first ride ever on Skip the Crowd. She's athletic and a quick study, moving off of a lunge line in no time. Here she offers a treat to her horse's mentor.)

6. "When is your next horse race?"



"When I was a kid, I used to breeze Thoroughbreds at the track, but my horse doesn't race any more. We do obedience tests and patterns. It's called dressage (or reining). Sometimes, when I'm brave enough we jump fences. No, I don't win money. I'm not a professional. I get a ribbon and keep Advil in the trailer." Seriously, the entirety of what most non-horsey folk know about horses is shown on TV three times a year: the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness, and the Belmont. Can we blame them for only knowing this aspect of the horse world? How often can you turn on TV in the US and see Grand Prix Dressage, CCI\*\* Eventing, or Barrel Racing? (PHOTO: The author on Skip the Crowd popping a crossrail for a student project on unusual sports and hobbies.)

7. "You do dressage? What's that?"



You don't have to explain the intricacies of Dressage anymore than a physicist needs to explain quantum theory to a 6 year old. "It's an obedience test through a series of patterns. There are a lot of levels. I'm at the bottom, hoping to work my way up. Did you know it's an Olympic sport?" (PHOTO: The author aboard Skip the Crowd warming up before dressage competition.)

8. "How do you make it jump like that?!"



It's called training, just like a NASCAR driver learns to turn left. Some horses love to jump and will jump anything. Some can be convinced they like it. Others move on to various other sports. "Did you know some horses can jump as high as seven feet?! Let me show you a YouTube video of the puissance competition." We teachers call this modeling, showing the student the material as we deliver the theory. Some Millennials are too busy watching prank videos on YouTube to know there's actually some good, educational resources on the site. *(PHOTO: Vinca, Dutch Warmblood stallion, standing at Flower Farm, Glen Rock, PA during the grueling 100-day Stallion Testing.)*

With all the global communication that inundates our world, people are more distant than ever before in history. Due to an exasperated climate of political correctness, we are afraid to talk to our neighbors, our co-workers, or people on the street. We move like automatons through the world and fail to connect. Each of us is a valuable library of adventures and by sharing those journeys can we inspire or be inspired to try new things and discover the many facets of this grand, but mortal, life. So the next time someone asks you a question about horses or riding (or anything) that seems silly, remember that you are a teacher (without realizing it). The question is no more silly than when a child asks why the sky is blue. Smile at the person, connect with their ignorance, and then help erase it.