

TRAINING, BOARDING & BUYING

A modern sport that is based on classical horsemanship.

by Jack Burns

It's no surprise Working Equitation is gaining popularity in the United States because of the broad appeal that it has with so many equestrians. It is a sport that has developed out of the traditions of classical horsemanship and traditional ranch work. It combines the formality, detail, and rigor of gymnastic arena work with the practical and utility work of negotiating obstacles inspired by what would be found around a working ranch. Riders are outfitted according to the tradition in which they train: dressage, western, or native Spanish or Portuguese attire.



There are four phases in a Working Equitation competition. The first phase is a dressage test. It's also called the Functionality phase. The test is very similar to an open dressage test where participants are scored on each movement and collective marks for the overall impression. The competitions differ slightly in that Working Equitation tests emphasize agility and handiness versus the highly expressive gaits of competitive dressage.

The second phase is Ease of Handling. Competitors negotiate an obstacle course and are judged on each obstacle with collective mark scores for the whole course. The emphasis is on smooth transitions between obstacles, fluidity and symmetry in and between obstacles. To score well in Ease of Handling, horse and rider need to be bold and confident as well as calm and adjustable.

Obstacles on a course and the type of work tested might be things that an equestrian would need to negotiate during the course of a working day on a ranch: gates, livestock pens, bridges, a slalom and even a low jump. The list of obstacles is determined according to the rules, but course designers can lay out the pattern as they see fit to make a fun, challenging and creative course.

The Speed phase is the third leg of the competition and perhaps the most exciting to ride and watch. This part of the trial uses the same obstacles, but instead of being judged on style, the event is timed. The fastest time minus any penalties, like knocking over obstacles, is the goal. The top horses and riders must be fast, handy, confident and calm under pressure.

The fourth phase is a cattle penning phase that is a team event of three to four riders so it is only seen in national or international shows. Each individual rider sorts a pre-selected cow for the whole team to herd into a pen and it's a timed event. Because it's a team event, this phase isn't included in competition where riders compete individually.

Versatility

That's a lot of training horse and rider need to do. "Versatility" is a word you hear a lot and a concept frequently discussed by trainers and judges. Barbara Price, president-elect of Working Equitation United (weunited.us) says, "The discipline is superb versatility training for horses and riders of all types; many horses seem to really enjoy the variety it brings to their training regimes, and most of all it's fun -- really fun!" That's part of the appeal of Working Equitation. It's an activity that is both intense and fun training at the same time.

Working Equitation United is a member-led organization that promotes and facilitates Working Equitation shows, clinics, and regional and local clubs throughout the United States.

June 2017 - Working Equitation

Written by Jack Burns

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WE United California region area director Polly Limond is optimistic about the future of Working Equitation. "I see Working Equitation today as dressage was here in the early 1980s, with people of all equestrian backgrounds becoming more and more interested."

The Los Angeles Equestrian Center hosted a Working Equitation competition during the Fiesta Charity Horse Show April 27-30. Riders from throughout the Western United States and as far away as Canada assembled to compete at the five levels of Working Equitation from Novice to Advanced. Despite the serious nature of the competition, competitors enjoyed a sense of camaraderie in their shared experience.

Advanced division champion, Carlos Carneiro spoke of his success when he said, "Take your time and do your dressage work. That's the basis of all of your work and without it you won't get too far. You do your dressage work through the obstacles."

Carneiro is a native of Portugal and is now based in Napa. He summarizes his feelings about Working Equitation by saying, "It's based on classical training and creates an amazing opportunity for horse and rider to develop their skills and trust and obtain a good connection."



Julie Alonzo, outgoing WE United president based in Oregon said, "Working Equitation is all about good horsemanship and about building better partnerships between horses and riders."

Gaining Popularity

Upcoming on the Working Equitation schedule is the National Championships in Sherwood, OR at Devonwood Equestrian Center September 2-4. As Working Equitation becomes more popular there will be more regional and national shows in the United States.

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Although the principles and activities of Working Equitation have been around for centuries, it's only been formalized as a sport since 1996 when France, Spain, Italy and Portugal established the first international championships. In 2004, the World Association of Working Equitation (wawe-official.com) was formed to establish international rules and be an advisory body for each country's domestic competitions and programs. Working Equitation is well established in Europe and parts of South and Central America and is quickly gaining popularity in the United States.

That is why we are seeing more local Working Equitation clubs and groups emerging throughout the United States especially in California. As people become introduced and familiar with the sport and this kind of training, they are recognizing the benefits and the fun that can be gained from doing it.

Author Jack Burns owns J-Dot Training Stables, a dressage, jumping, and working equitation stables at Sonoma Equestrian Center in Sonoma. For more info on Working Equitation, Lusitanos for sale, or trips to Portugal go to: www.jdotstables.com , jburns@sbcglobal.net .