

AMERICA'S HORSE

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TOM RYAN'S PORTRAITS
from the Four Sixes Ranch

How your
horse hobby
and your
Significant
Other can
peacefully
coexist



TRUCE!

By Anne Lang

You know the scenario. It's Friday night, and you're packing the trailer with gear for yet another weekend horse show, rodeo, trail ride or whatever. Lurking in the shadows nearby, watching you with his/her arms defiantly crossed is the love of your life (spouse, fiancé, boyfriend, girlfriend - you get the picture).

You hum a lively tune, hoping that your cheerful attitude

will somehow rub off on The Sullen One. But it doesn't work. It never does.

The usual dreaded questions and laments start firing in your direction.

"So, will you be as late as you were last time? It was 1 a.m. before you got home last Sunday!

What am I supposed to eat while you're gone? There's nothing in the refrigerator, and since I'm gonna be watch-

ing the kids, it'll be hard to get to the grocery store.

How much is this costing, anyway? Honestly, you spend more money on that horse...

And when am I gonna start getting as much attention as you give to that critter?"

After unsuccessful attempts at appeasement, off you eventually go, rattling down the driveway with "that critter" in tow – feeling guilty as all get-out but not sure how to resolve the situation. Well, take heart: a panel of folks who were once in your sorry shoes have a wealth of suggestions for restoring peace and contentment on the home front, without sacrificing the sport that you'd rather die for than give up. Following are the nuggets of their collective wisdom.

Lee Meier, 42, chief of hospital anesthesia services, Trenton, Texas

Horse activity: Novice amateur western pleasure and horsemanship; went to 15 AQHA shows in 1998

Life partner/spouse: Eileen, 43, "domestic goddess, barn superintendent and social chairman." Recently began riding again after an extended hiatus (since childhood).

Children: Khrysanthe Amanda, 10 (rides and competes in open shows)

What partner does during horse competitions: "Eileen is usually at home practicing on her Quarter Horse for upcoming three-day event competitions or else she competes the same weekend as me. Our daughter travels with one of us, depending on whether she's showing or not."

Partner's previous complaints: "That the money spent on horse shows could have gone toward other things such as IRA funds, college tuition, remodeling the house, etc. A successful show season takes a lot of planning, practicing and budgeting of time and money. The money set aside or spent on any recreational activity should come from, or be considered as, disposable income."

How a mutually agreeable situation was created: "To even the odds, I've encouraged and supported my wife in her pursuit of equestrian activities. To accomplish this, I had to relinquish my prized Quarter Horse mare for her to use. She also needed a new horse trailer and truck to take her to the events, clinics and lessons in a riding discipline that's different than mine. She chose three-day eventing (cross-country/stadium jumping/dressage), which takes her in another direction and in a different competitive circle than AQHA's. Next on my list was to figure out how to pay for all of these big-ticket items associated with her competitions. Texas Lotto tickets just weren't making me rich, so I've taken on extra work in addition to my full-time duties, to help her achieve her competition goal."

Advice for others: "Identify the source of unhappiness. If time is the issue, you may have to adjust your schedule to

accommodate your spouse, or fill in areas that are deficient. If money is an issue, you may need to massage the budget so things are a little more equitable. More importantly, I would encourage finding ways to spend more time together. Perhaps your spouse would like to travel with you to different cities where shows are held for shopping, restaurants, visiting historical sites, etc."

Anna Marie Cooper, 51, bookkeeper/bus driver/retail clerk, Quincy, Michigan

Horse activity: English and western pleasure; shows most summer weekends

Life partner/spouse: Gary, 51, grain elevator manager and trucking broker. Rides "rarely; only on a dare." Enjoys classic cars and hunting. Research collaborator with lawyer and fellow horse-show husband Jon Lawniczak for future book to be titled: "Things Husbands Don't Do At A Horse Show."

Children: One, grown

What partner does during horse competitions: "Chores or adds another chapter to the (above-mentioned) book."

Partner's previous complaints: "At our house, my riding is not called a hobby – it's called a habit. Gary complains that the housework and bookkeeping don't get done, and I'm spending too much money. But his comment 100 percent of the time is that he still loves me!"

How a mutually agreeable situation was created: "I work three paying jobs, plus I keep track of his trucking books to support my habit. I also sell feed on the side."

Advice for others: "Get your spouse involved somehow at the shows. We have met many great people on the circuit, with my having been on the state association board and president of our amateur association. We've become acquainted with a lot of other horse people whose spouses are not involved (in riding)."

Thomas Hatch, 45, mechanical engineer, Williamson, New York

Horse activity: English and western; shows a couple weekends per month (summer only)

Life partner/spouse: Laura, 43, magazine editor; doesn't ride; enjoys genealogy research and reading books

Children: Two, both grown

What partner does during horse competitions: "My wife comes to about 70 percent of my shows. If not, she works on her genealogy; sometimes she works on genealogy at the shows – depending on the show's location and whether or not there's a major library in that town. If she comes to a show, she also helps with grooming – she does an excellent job of braiding and banding."

Partner's previous complaints: "The time spent is probably the biggest concern, since my daughter no longer shows and therefore the shows have become less of a fam-

ily event. Laura still likes to watch me compete and supports me in this; however, all the dead time at a show seems like a waste, given our long list of things to do at home. The other part of the time element is the evening and weekend hours put into training. Money is also a concern with two children in college now. My wife has been working full-time the past few years to support those college costs, and this has enabled me to keep showing."

How a mutually agreeable situation was created: "We both compromise so that we get time together. Laura con-

Think harmony with non-horsey family members

Respect their hobbies and interests the way you'd like them to respect yours.

Acknowledge their contributions, whether it's supplying part of the funds or merely being gracious enough to ignore the smell of your boots.

Encourage them if and when they want to interact with your horse or any others. Tell them your help is available, but don't tell them what to do, unless they might be risking injury. Most of the things we feel compelled to correct aren't as important as we tend to think, especially compared to our friends' feelings.

Incorporate their hobbies into yours: For instance, photo buffs (or video-meisters) might find it interesting to "shoot" not only their significant other at shows or events, but also might find that they can make friends and/or some extra dough lending their services to other horse people. Ditto for those who like to sew – custom show clothes at a fraction of the cost! And carpenter types might design a wooden tack trunk or saddle rack, build or repair jumps, or even build fancy driveway entries, fences and barns.

Organize tailgate parties (at shows, trail rides or other events) with other couples/families. The non-horsey folks will gratefully flock to one another, anxious to discuss any topic that doesn't focus on hooved beasts and their bewildering habits.

Get them involved behind the scenes – whether it's helping out in the show office (where they can gloat to you about being ensconced in a temperature-controlled environment), volunteering as arena crew, chairing a committee or sharing driving shifts on those longer hauls.

Offer specific tradeoffs (particularly those who leave children in the care of their significant other, which puts a definite limit on their free time): Exchange one two-day horse show for his two-day golf trip, or her two-day shopping trip.

Final thought: Most adult horse-lovers fall into one of two categories: those who live with someone who is supportive of their horse hobby, and those who are divorced from one who wasn't! Your attitude and actions go a long way toward influencing their acceptance of your other significant other – your horse!

tinues to go to some shows and a few association meetings. I don't go to quite as many shows, and have also started going to some open shows which are only on Sundays – and quite a bit less expensive. When our daughter was showing, she was active in the youth group and in the shows helping my daughter get ready. Later, she became editor of the Empire State Quarter Horse Association's monthly newsletter. She did this for a couple of years, which kept her involved with the people and made going to the shows more interesting for her. We still manage the website for the group. She really likes organizing and documenting, so joining the association really helped get her involved."

Advice for others: "I think showing an interest in the spouse's activity and giving the kind of support that you hope you can get in return makes it easier for both to achieve their individual goals. Have gatherings or parties with friends who show, and get all the spouses to know each other outside the show environment. At the barn where I train and board, there are four of us who show mostly together, and we also socialize as a group with some other people from the barn."

Elizabeth Place, 31, horse trainer, Escondido, California
Horse activity: Western and hunt seat

Life partner/spouse: Christopher, a firefighter, who rides "very little."

Children: None

What partner does during horse competitions: "He stays home and works."

Partner's previous complaints: "None. He likes it that I train horses, and he supports me 100 percent."

How a mutually agreeable situation was created: "I've been trying to get him to take lessons, but we sold his horse and he doesn't want to ride any others. He does come to the shows – including last year's World Show – and he watches me ride a lot."

Advice for others: "Non-riding spouses should get involved somehow, by either helping haul, getting a horse of their own or developing their own hobby. My husband loves horses, so I'm very lucky. He also met me at the ranch, so he knows my deal."

Jeff Fulgham, 44, bank employee, Brownsboro, Texas
Horse activity: Variety of western divisions; showed about every other weekend last summer and plans to show even more in 1999.

Life partner/spouse: Janet, 38, housewife. Has started riding and plans to show this year.

Children: Two, grown; also Katy, 8, who just started showing in walk-trot

What partner does during horse competitions: "My wife

and daughter help me a lot, from loading the trailer to grooming and cleaning stalls. They did get a chance to do a little shopping during The Classic.”

Partner’s previous complaints: “She used to complain that I spent too much money on horses and equipment, instead of buying couches or antiques – ha! She also complained when I wanted to go to the longer (3-4-day) shows, and about my being away from the house. Her only complaint now is Sunday horse shows.”

How a mutually agreeable situation was created: “I bought Janet her own horse. Actually, she rode my horse in walk-trot classes at some open shows. After lots of prodding and confidence building, she was convinced that she could do it. She won first place every time and that changed her outlook on horse shows. It also cost me more, but that’s okay. That was my goal, so for my birthday last fall I bought her a new saddle with all the trimmings. As a trade-off, we sold our old trailer for one with living quarters – she loves to camp, but not me. Now Janet is real excited about showing, which makes home life a lot better.”

Advice for others: “If the non-riding spouse has no love of horses, they have to meet somewhere in the middle to survive. But if they’re patient, things work out for the best. Horses and showing is like any other hobby: it’s as expensive as you let it be, but the rewards are greater than any golf game I’ve been involved in, and I love to play golf. Janet and I go to movies, do get-away nights together and used to go antique shopping a lot, but now I can’t keep her out of the tack stores! Ain’t life grand?”

began to wonder where all his money was going, so he started coming with me to check it out. Eventually, he went from having nothing to do with the horses and not wanting me to talk about them, to being with me when the vet comes and holding them for the farrier, along with going to shows. Now he’s president of the Ohio State Buckskin Association and goes to almost all of the shows.”

Advice for others: “Hang in there. Don’t ever push them to go along with you; make them want to go. Be encouraging when he/she is around the horses. Never scold him/her for ‘not doing it right.’”



And we all lived happily ever after.

Lisa Campbell Hufnagel, 30, owner of vehicle leasing company, Grand Ledge, Michigan

Horse activity: Hunter under saddle. Until this year, used to show nearly every weekend, April-October.

Life partner/spouse: Scott Hufnagel, 35, self-employed. Doesn’t ride; enjoys golf and snowmobiling.

What partner does during horse competitions: Golf or work

Partner’s previous complaints: “My husband had a difficult time with the number of horse shows I attended. He didn’t like it that I was away from home so often. He didn’t enjoy attending horse shows and he was feeling left out.”

How a mutually agreeable situation was created: “The situation has improved, since I am no longer showing on a regular basis. I had been showing extensively for almost 15 years, and while he would never have asked me to quit, I felt that it was time to focus on other aspects of life. I sold my show gelding and purchased another broodmare; and while Scott still isn’t riding, he has taken a great interest in the care and raising of our foals.”

Advice for others: “Find a compromise. In our situation, hunter under saddle was traded in for raising weanlings and yearling long line.” ☺

Melanie Bittinger, 36, scheduling coordinator for an electronics firm, Butler, Ohio

Horse activity: Western pleasure, halter and showmanship; shows most weekends; competed at the International Buckskin Horse Association World Show and at Congress

Life partner/spouse: Tim, 37, plant manager. Doesn’t ride; used to play softball, basketball and golf, but now spends most of his “leisure” time working on the couple’s small farm.

Children: None

What partner does during horse competitions: “Mostly, Tim comes with me to horse shows. If not, he’s usually building a new barn or making hay.”

Partner’s previous complaints: “His former complaints were that the horses ate better than he did – that we never ran out of grain but we’d run out of milk; and that I spent more time with them than I did with him. I used to hide horse equipment in the trunk or another room, so he wouldn’t know how much money I’d spent. One time he told me he used to be envious of the horses because I always wanted to be with them.”

How a mutually agreeable situation was created: “Tim used to play softball or golf several times a week. Then he