

Still riding high in the saddle

Equestrian, 70, a work horse at decades-old riding school

By Anne Lang

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For nearly five decades, Ginger Pool has maintained a rural-oriented business in pockets of Austin's urban community.

Pool, 70, has devoted her life to one of Texas' most enduring symbols — the horse. An estimated 2,000 Austin children and adults have learned to ride under the strict guidance of the energetic horsewoman, who is described as "a treasure" by one of her students.

Pool's School of Horsemanship is just southwest of Barrington Oaks subdivision, near the intersection of D-K Ranch and Texas Plume. Her road to that corner of Austin began in 1945 with her first teaching job at Jimmy and Mary Ellen Burr's Hobby Horse Farm, then on Hancock Drive near Memorial Park Cemetery.

The equestrian credentials Pool brought with her from her native New Jersey included years of experience with family-owned horses. During her 11-year tenure at Hobby Horse, Pool has also taught riding to 100 UT students each semester. The students received physical education credit for their lessons.

Pool's 1955 marriage to G. Wilford Pool, a paving business owner, was followed by the opening of her own Running Rope Ranch in 1959 with a dozen or so horses near Chimney Corners and Hart Lane in what is now Northwest Hills.

"It was all country out there back then," Pool recalled. "There was a big gravel pit nearby that's been covered by a shopping center." Those shops line the north side of Far West Boulevard.

The threat of development eventually prompted Pool to relocate her school to Texas Plume Road in 1966. At that time, the area was called Northwest Ranchettes, and the house built by Pool's husband, who died in 1986,

was one of three in the area.

Today hundreds of homes surround the riding school. However, Pool's facility still encompasses several acres on which there is a riding ring, an eight-stall barn, a "loafing shed" for shelter, a tree-shaded pasture and several turn-out enclosures.

"We used to have access to 700 acres of riding trails," Pool said. "Now we're down to about 25." Though the riders are no longer able to travel as far south as Bull Creek, one of the still-accessible trails meanders along a ridge overlooking Great Hills subdivision in one direction and the northwest end of Spicewood Springs Road in the other.

Ann Ayres, who has been riding with Pool since junior high in 1962, boards two horses at the barn. She respects Pool's grass-roots approach to teaching.

"Ginger's taught me that riding's more than just what the horse can do for you; it's a mutual give-and-take," Ayres said. "She obviously loves what she's doing, and that comes through to us. She's been a great influence on me, and I wouldn't have my horses anywhere else."

Beth Alley, who began riding with Pool in 1964 at age 10 and keeps a horse at the stable, agreed: "Ginger instills discipline, and she encourages you to keep at it. This stable is unique because it's very personal. You get much more individual training, and she really cares about you."

Although there are still 10 horses in Pool's care, most are owned by boarders, and some of those horses are used in lessons by advanced riders. Pool no longer takes students at the beginner level, because all her beginner school horses have been retired to her pasture. The oldest one is a remarkable 32.

Pool's horsemanship regimen means students clean their own saddles and bridles, groom the horses thoroughly, and clean the

stalls. Pool feeds the horses each morning and takes care of daily barn chores herself, but is assisted with the evening feeding by one or more boarders who come out to ride each day.

Pool said one of her biggest challenges has been making sure her horses are trained well enough to make safe mounts for their riders.

"The horses have to be tolerant of riders at all levels," she said. "If you have good horses, you've got a good school. You can't make good students on poor horses."

Some of the rewards Pool has enjoyed include "making a student that didn't have a lot of talent or confidence into a decent, competent rider. You don't always make a top rider out of everybody, but you can make a good horseman. I like to teach horsemanship, not just riding."



Photo by Ann Lang

Horseback riding instructor Ginger Pool, 70, works with longtime pupil Ann Ayres, riding on her horse, Murphy.