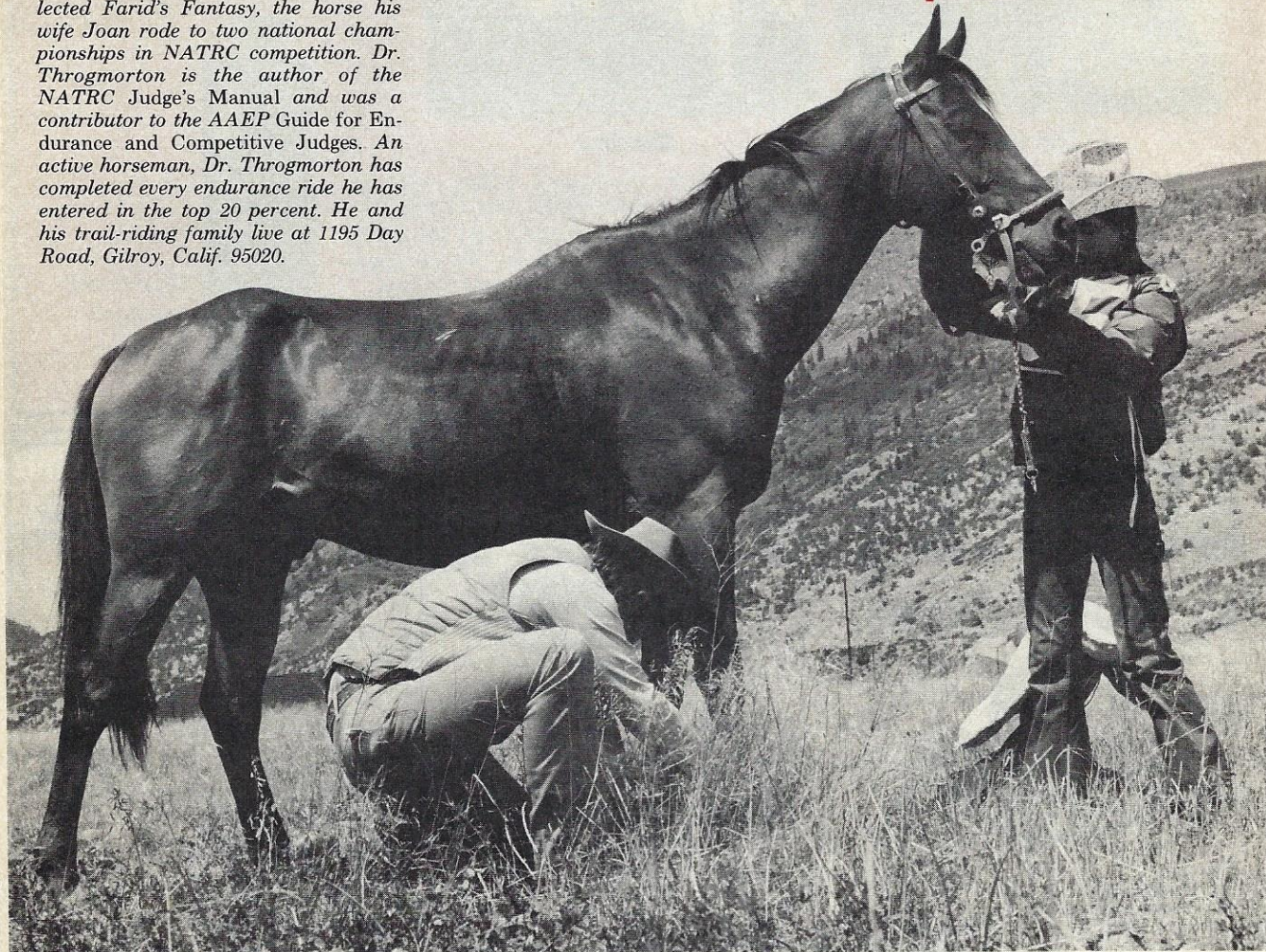


The Competitive Trail Horse

Return To Joan H.

Dr. Bill Throgmorton is an approved North American Trail Ride Conference (NATRC) judge and an approved endurance ride veterinarian in the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP). He has been judging competitive rides for 11 years and endurance rides for the past 10 years. Dr. Throgmorton was the breeder of Dusty, a Morgan horse that his daughter Linda rode to the President's Cup in 1970 NATRC competition. He selected Stormy, a Pony of the Americas that daughter Denise rode to the same cup in the 1972 competition. He also selected Farid's Fantasy, the horse his wife Joan rode to two national championships in NATRC competition. Dr. Throgmorton is the author of the NATRC Judge's Manual and was a contributor to the AAEP Guide for Endurance and Competitive Judges. An active horseman, Dr. Throgmorton has completed every endurance ride he has entered in the top 20 percent. He and his trail-riding family live at 1195 Day Road, Gilroy, Calif. 95020.

How to Select a Champion



Chan Bergen

• Lana Clymer's horse gets a going over by veterinary judge Terry Swanson at the completion of the River Ridge competitive trail ride in Aspen, Colorado.

HOW DO we select a champion? What is a champion made of? The answers to these questions are not easily come by. The answers depend on what qualities the founding fathers of the particular competition think he should possess. Thus, when I speak of a competitive trail horse champion, I am describing the animal that possesses all the

By **BILL C. THROGMORTON, D.V.M.**

ideal features necessary for a championship performance.

A champion competitive horse does not have to be beautiful, but he must perform beautifully. I like to quote my partner's definition of beauty, which is, "Beauty is as beauty does." Think about it for a minute, and I am sure we can all

agree this statement applies to many areas of our lives.

We all speak lovingly about the old horse that takes care of the children one week and then takes us sure-footedly through the rocks and snow for an elk hunt the next week. This might not be the horse that would place in any halter class of any breed; none-the-less he is truly beautiful because you



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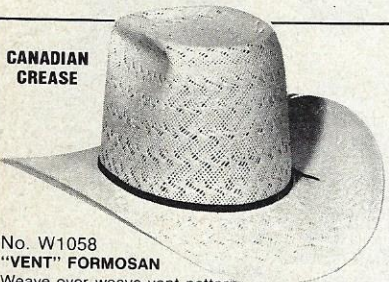
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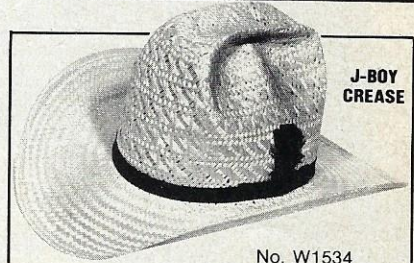
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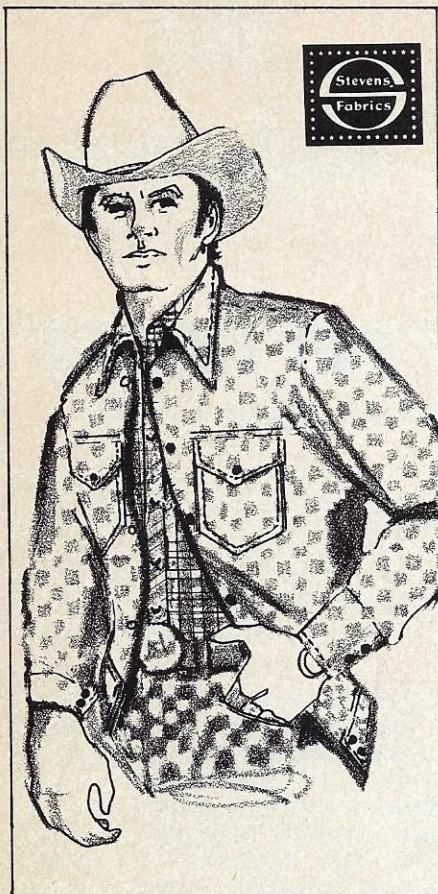
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know he is reliable, dependable, and provides a steady performance.

We must select a trail horse that is suited to the task. He must be sound both physically and mentally. Some horses in all breeds are well suited to competitive trail riding, but not all horses of any breed. You must seek out the individuals which meet the criterion of selection from within the breed you most desire to ride.

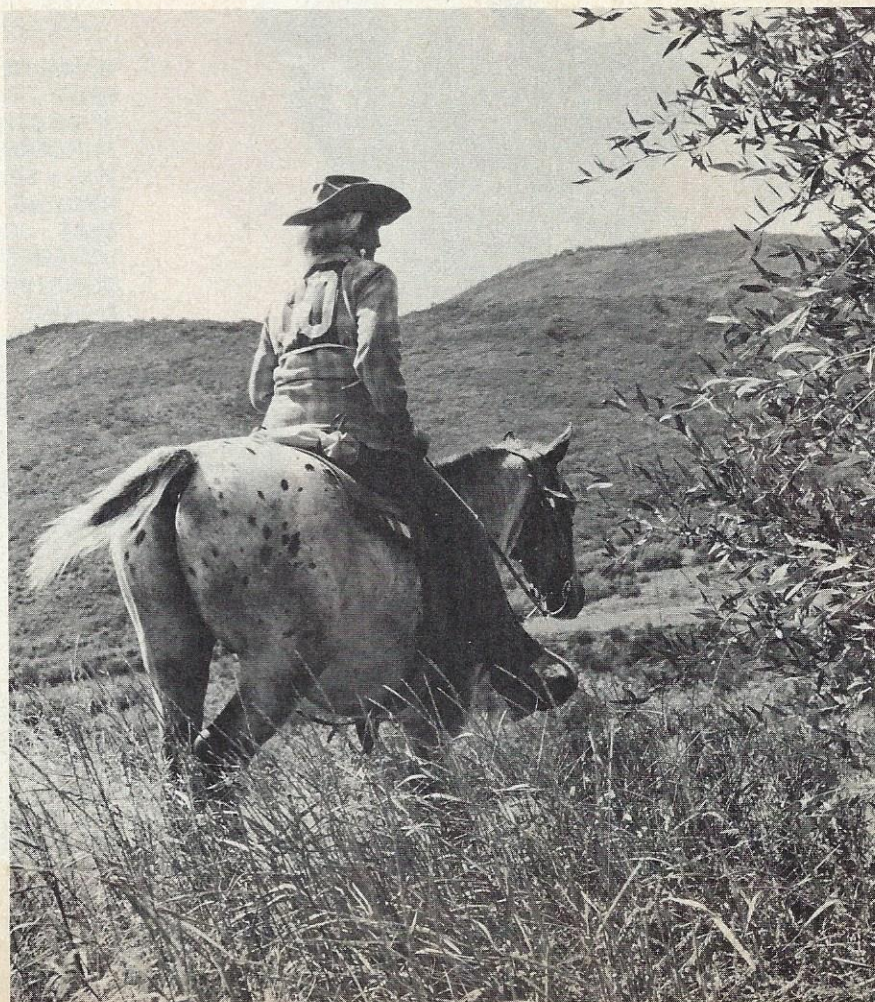
Let me say, before I go further, that soundness is of paramount importance in the competitive horse. Without a sound horse you have no horse. For too long now the breed associations have encouraged the selection of horses based on beauty, speed, color, size, etc. with no emphasis placed on soundness and durable performance. The saying goes, "When she goes lame we'll breed her." Or if you ask another horseman when he will breed old Bess, his answer would be, "Breed old Bess? Oh no,

I have ridden her for ten years and she is as sound as a rock. She is the only horse on the place that stays sound enough to ride. Breed her and I lose my mount." The time has come to introduce soundness into our breeding programs.

Competitive trail ride competition is the natural tool to test a breeding program for its production of sound, durable horses. I have seen the value of trail rides for pointing out the weaknesses of our past selective breeding programs. We can and should use this tool to improve our breeds by including the selection for durability and soundness. Trail riding is the proving ground for endurance and soundness just as the track is for speed and the show ring for beauty.

Let's get to the business at hand of selecting a champion. We need to break the task down to its component parts: those of movement, stride, conformation, size (weight), temperament, and heart-lung ca-

(Continued on page 195)



Chan Bergen

• A rider and her mount, down from the high country, head for the finish line on the final day of a class A competitive trail ride.

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SABRINA SCHMIDT of Rosanky, Texas turns a barrel during 1973 TYRA competition. Sabrina is the reigning Texas and National High School Rodeo Queen. In achieving this honor, she became the first young lady to ever make a "clean sweep" of all the judged Queen events.

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Competitive Trail

(Continued from page 112)

capacity. We will focus upon and deal with each component individually.

The first criterion of selection is *movement*. How free a horse moves is directly related to the effort he will use to create that movement. By free motion is meant a free-flowing action; the legs seem to move in easy, continuous motion with no jerking or exaggerated action like park action, or high knee action of gaited horses in general. High knee or hock action—while it may have appeal to fanciers of gaited horses—is a definite disadvantage to the competitive horse because it results in wasted energy.

Horses that have excessive muscle—or short, thick-muscled bodies—work excessively to produce movement. They expend more energy per mile than do lightly muscled horses. An effort should be made to avoid heavily muscled horses.

The *stride* of a horse is the measured distance traveled in one complete cycle. In other words how far, let us say, any one foot travels from the time it leaves the ground until it strikes again.

The length of stride varies greatly between breeds and between individuals within breeds. Free-moving, long-strided horses will over-step at the walk by as



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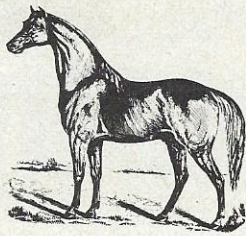
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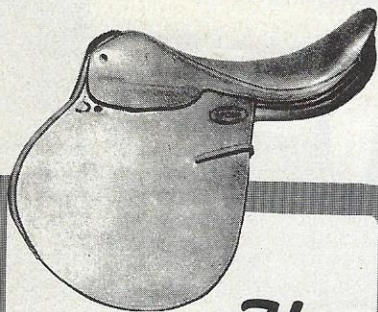
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much as 12 inches each cycle. This means the hind-foot print will be 12 inches in front of the front-foot print. The importance of a long stride is dramatically seen when you relate this to the speed at which a horse normally walks. Long-strided horses naturally walk faster than do short-strided ones. Horses can walk between 3 to 5½ miles per hour with the average being about 3½ to 3¾ miles per hour. Few horses walk 5+ mph, but some do.

The majority of North American Trail Ride Conference (NATRC) rides on the west coast are set to a pace of slightly more than 5 mph (35 miles in 6½ to 7 hours). This might seem rather slow, but when you consider the mountainous terrain we have, it is a good test of horses. Some rides have as much as 5,000 feet of ascent and 5,000 feet of descent included in one day's ride. Short-strided horses tend to slow to 3 mph or less on steep climbs, while long-strided horses can walk 4 to 4½ mph on climbs. Likewise on descending grades, the long-strided horses do better.

Short-strided horses, especially those with broad chests and heavy muscles, work harder going down steep grades than they do climbing the same grades. This is indicated by the fact that their pulse and respiration readings are sometimes higher after a steep downgrade than after an equidistance steep upgrade.

This leads us to the next criterion of selection: *conformation*. Straight legs are nice, but are not essential as long as the deviation does not lead to interference or excessive lateral or medial rotary motion. Most mature horses will travel sound and remain sound if they are shod to maintain their natural gait. The only corrections that should be made are for those actions which lead to interference, forging, cross-firing, or over-reaching. The rule is: as long as the legs don't hit, then keep them natural. Avoid these conditions if they are excessive: too-long sloping pastern, calf knees, toe-out (splay), toe-in (pigeon-toe), and sickle hocks.

A good, long, sloping shoulder is essential to a longer stride. The straight shoulder leads to a short stride. A good short back means



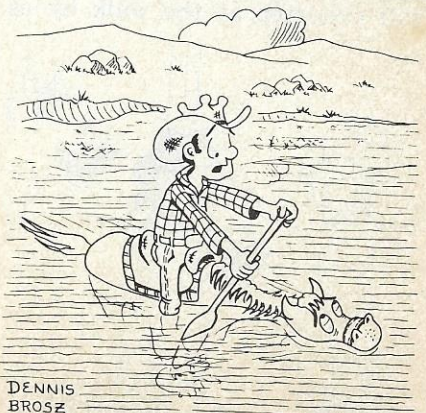
• Bill Throgmorton and Stormy, the POA that Denise Throgmorton rode to the President's Cup in 1972 NATRC competition. Jim Whitcomb shot this photo during the awards banquet at the end of the competitive year.

strength. A long underline helps to prevent over-reaching and forging while allowing for a long stride. The good slope and medium length of the pastern are essential to maintaining a comfortable gait. Straight, short pasterns lead to such unsoundnesses as ringbone, sidebone, and possibly navicular.

The foot conformation is ultra important since this is the supporting base for the whole body. The foot contains the initial shock absorbing mechanism of the legs. A healthy, well-developed foot is the absolute key to soundness.

There should be first of all a good strong, thick, durable wall which carries well around to the heel. The wall should be capable of holding nails well so as not to lose shoes. Thin walls won't hold nails and often lead to shoeing founder. The sole should be concave and thick. No evidence of pain should be elicited by firm pressure applied with a hoof tester over the whole sole, frog, bars, or sulcus of the foot.

A foot should not be small and



DENNIS
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• "I'll bet you're the only horse in this whole state who doesn't know how to swim."

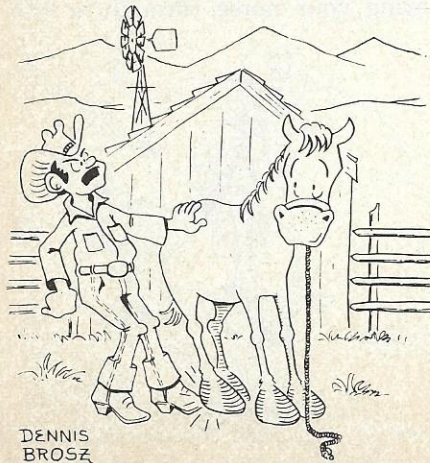


• "Ah! It's so good to be out in the open and away from crowds!"

dainty, but rather it should be in relation to the size of the horse it will be required to support. It should not be flat on the sole as this does not allow for enough ground clearance. The bulb of the heel should not be down on the ground as this leads to bruising damage when walking in rocks.

The frog should be well developed, full, and free of thrush and foul odors. The frog must remain in good contact with the ground if an open, non-contracted heel is to be maintained. Let the heels contract badly and lameness is not far behind.

Just as a reminder, the foot strikes the ground with a force of approximately 700 pounds per square inch at the walk. This increases to 1,600 pounds per square inch at the trot, and 2,100 pounds per square inch at the lope. The heavier the horse and the smaller the foot, the higher these values will be. Couple the heavy weight of some of our horses with their fine, trim bones and small feet,

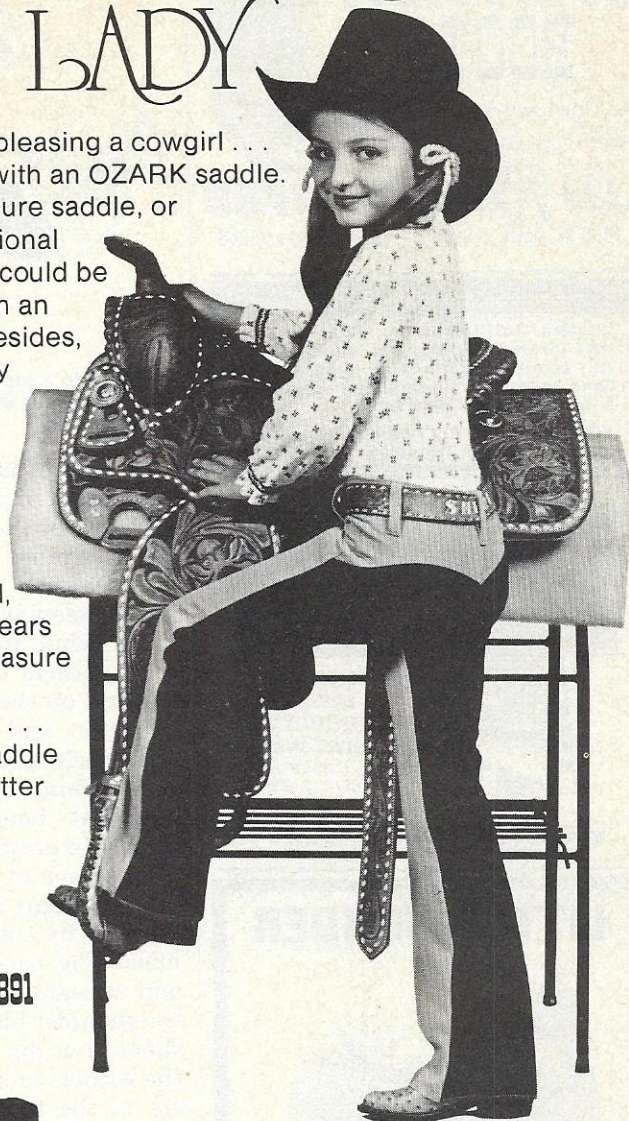


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• "Look, I don't mind having my foot stepped on once in awhile, but I sure don't like having it stood on!"

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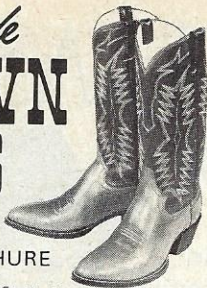
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• "The trip I took was only three miles, but I feel like it was six miles . . . mostly up and down!"

and you're sure to increase the possibility of an unsoundness developing in the lower limb.

There must be a good definition of the withers. The withers are the key to keeping the saddle in place when riding in the hills. Without good withers the saddle will rock and roll on the back causing wear, irritation, and pain. Tight cinches and cinch sores are the result of poor definition of the withers with resultant binding of the cinch tightly to prevent saddle slippage.

The back of a horse just simply must be right if you are not to be plagued by sore withers and sore loins. The back should be strong and straight, and well fitted into the shoulder blades and withers. It should not dip too sharply behind the withers or sway from the withers to the loin. The back should have enough muscle so that the dorsal spines of the vertebrae do not protrude above the muscles. The back should not be too broad and flat like a table top as the saddle will not fit well and will tend to roll. The rider will need extremely good balance to prevent back and cinch tenderness from shifting tack if the back is too flat.

Often the back is not full behind the withers, so that it will not support a saddle. This results in the gullet of the saddle rubbing on top of the withers. Excessively high withers will cause the same problem.

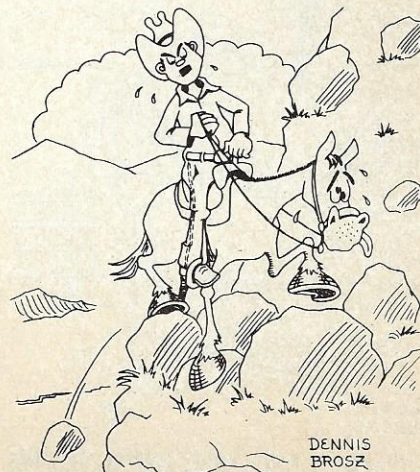
Many horses are open-shouldered or mutton-withered; thus the back and shoulder do not fit together well. There is a hollow pocket formed behind the shoulder blade. This pocket causes the saddle to slip back as the shoulder

blade works in its oval pattern. The breast collar or hunt martingale must be used to prevent the saddle from moving back. The horse is put at a disadvantage when the rider's weight is carried too far back toward the loin and rear quarters which are designed to push, not carry weight.

Try to select a horse with a good back, withers, and a tight, well-fitted shoulder so that the point of juncture between these structures is smooth. Good withers and a sound back that does not fall away (sway) behind the withers are excellent for maintaining a saddle in place while working in the mountains.

We commonly class competitive horses as to the amount of weight they carry (rider and tack). There is, however, a much greater variation between body weights of individual horses. There can be as much as 300 to 500 pounds difference in the weight of the various breeds used for competitive riding. If it is considered that a one-pound difference in weight can make a difference of one second in running a mile on the track, it is easy to understand what happens when we ride big, heavy horses. A well-conditioned 15-hand Arabian will weigh between 800 to 950 pounds, while a well-conditioned Quarter Horse of the working type will weigh 1,000 to 1,150 pounds. It is easy to see why the Quarter Horse is having difficulty in *endurance* riding.

In *competitive* riding, however, Quarter Horses are doing well because speed is not the essential quantity. The object is to cover a given trail in a given time and bring your horse through in the



• "Now I know why they call them the Rocky Mountains."



• "Help! I'm running out of horse!"

best possible condition. Also, the horse should be well-mannered and handle himself well over various trail obstacles. This is where the disposition of the Quarter Horses comes through. Their weight over long distances is a disadvantage; however, their disposition which allows for proper pacing without fretting is to their advantage. Selecting light-framed horses with medium width is the key.

Like any good athlete, the equine athlete must have the proper *temperament*. Better yet, his attitude must be suited to his work. Equally important is his attitude towards other horses and obstacles which he encounters on the trail. He must be able to work in a crowd or be content to work alone. There can be no buddying or fretting for a stablemate or acquired friend. Nothing will be more detrimental than fretting. This will cause a tremendous expenditure of nervous energy. When fretting over the loss of a buddy, a horse will not negotiate trail obstacles with any kind of finesse. He will not respond to the rider. The head is high, resulting in poor foot placement, stumbling, etc. In essence, they work like a thrashing machine; hitting, bumping, and crashing over brush, limbs, and rocks.

When the horse and rider are in touch with each other there is a good working relationship. The horse will respond by collecting himself, becoming attentive, and watching the trail. To respond in this manner the horse must get his head down and watch where he is putting his feet.

The impulsion which a horse possesses must be adequate to



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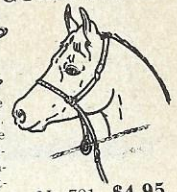
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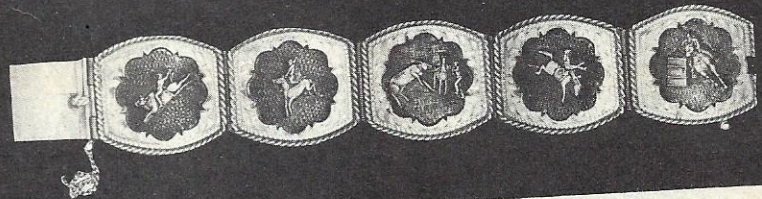
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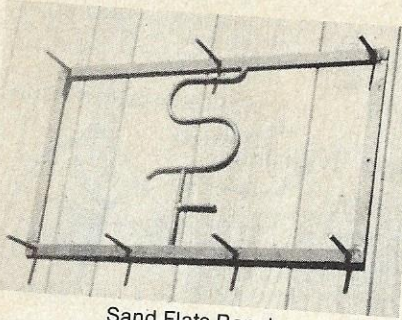
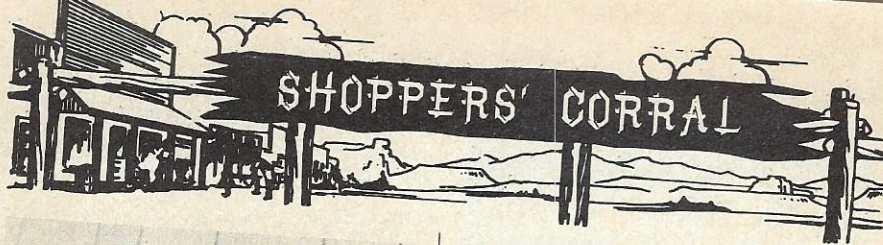
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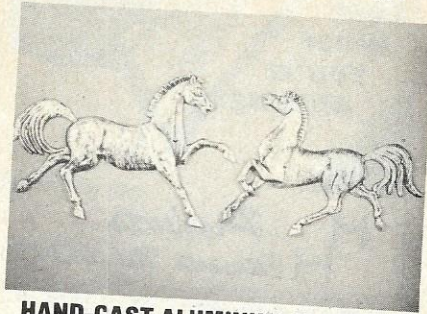
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avoid having to push him all day; yet, it cannot be such that you must continually fight to get him to take the pace you desire. The person heard making the statement, "I have a great horse for trail riding, he just won't quit," really lets you know you are talking to an amateur. They will all quit when they get enough—even the "goer." So you can keep your goer. I need a horse who likes work, but is willing to go at the pace I set. If he has to jig instead of walk, fight his bit and toss his head instead of relaxing and watching the terrain, then riding is worse than walking.

Too little impulsion and you get tired from urging him down the trail; too much and you suffer from hand blisters, arm fatigue, back strain, and, in my case, acid indigestion from frustration. Get a horse with the proper attitude when you select one because you are going to have to live with him.

No work of this type would be complete without consideration of *heart and lungs*. The heart of a competitive horse should be sound and strong. It is difficult to measure and evaluate the heart of the living animal; however, certain things can be said about the heart. The slower the resting heart rate, the larger the capacity. There should be no evidence of heart murmurs, especially severe ones. Gallop beats (four-beat heart sounds) usually indicate a horse has had hard work and should not be interpreted as abnormal. Well-

conditioned horses commonly have a resting heart rate of 28 to 32 beats per minute at night.

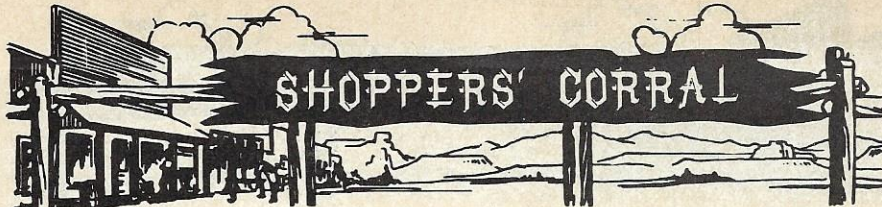
The ability of a horse to take in an adequate amount of air can be evaluated by checking the nostrils and throatlatch and listening to him breathe after exercise. The nostrils should be large and open so as not to restrict air flow. The nose should not be too narrow as this can result in reduction of the internal air passage volume. The horse is one animal that takes in almost 100 percent of his air intake through the nose and does no mouth breathing. The horse must not have any restriction to air flow through the nostrils, nasal turbinates, or nasopharynx—or, for that matter, any portion of the air deliverancy system.

The area between the jaws and the throatlatch must not be narrow and restricted. Any restriction of the air passages can be heard after a short, vigorous exercise. If there is any doubt about restriction, then listen to the nose, throat, trachea, and lungs with a stethoscope. Any restriction will cause air turbulence that can be heard with the stethoscope.

The lung capacity of a horse is more closely related to the depth of the chest than to its width. Thus a deep chest of good length and medium width is desirable. The horse at rest should breathe at four to eight respirations per minute. If a horse does not have a good lung capacity, he will consistently respond to stress by panting rather than deep breathing. Panting is very inefficient for oxygen exchange and it will not facilitate rapid recovery from stress.

When selecting the competitive trail horse, first watch his action and stride as they are the basic criterion of selection. Then consider the size, conformation, and disposition. Lastly check the lung and heart capacity. Then make certain of his soundness. Should a horse have all these qualities, he has the makings of a champion. The one remaining requirement is the time and effort it takes to condition and compete your horse.

While winning is not everything, it's much the best to losing. Riding is the real reward due the avid trail rider.



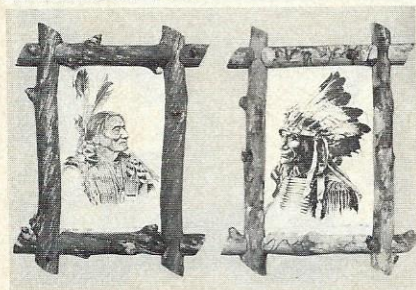
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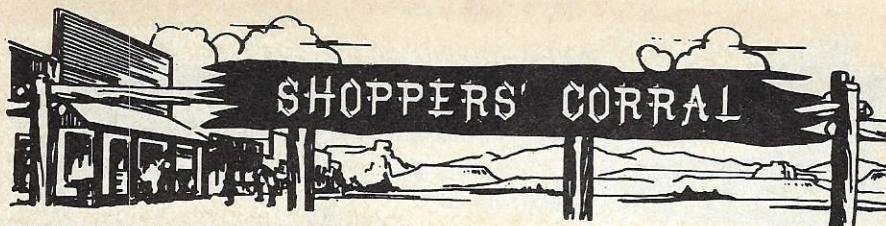
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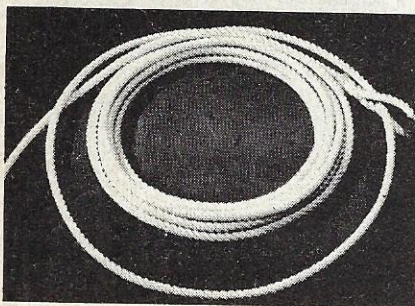
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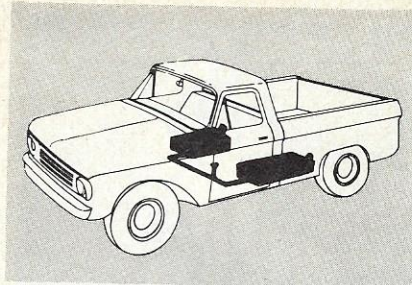
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Coming Events

Dates listed in these columns must be received at *The Western Horseman* by the 8th of the month two months prior to publication. The charge is \$5 for a two-line listing in one issue only. Please list the correct date, name of the event, and place; and enclose with \$5 payment mailed to "Coming Events," *The Western Horseman*, P.O. Box 280, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80901

April 29-May 4

Jim Shoulders Rodeo Riding School: *Henryetta, Okla. 74437*

May 4-5

Invitational Cowboy Polo Tournament (Paul Dutton, ph. 303-424-2222): *Arvada, Colo.*

May 9-12

Arabian Horse Fair (Arabian Horse Society, P.O. Box 85, Lebanon, Ohio 45036): *Louisville, Ky.*

May 18

Tri-County Trail Assn. 30-Mile Competitive Ride (Arvine Whitmer, 5489 Riverdale Rd. S.W., Bolivar, Ohio 44612): *E. Sparta, Ohio*

May 18-19

Tywama Saddle Club All-Indian Rodeo (Rt. 1, Box 3): *Tygh Valley, Ore. 97063*

May 19

American Mustang National Championship Show (Karla Ballreich, 714-449-8819, Lakeside, Calif.): *San Diego, Calif.*

May 24-26

Cavalier Riding Club NATRC Competitive Trail Ride (Ike Mosgrove, 7260 Tobin Rd., Colo. Springs, Colo. 80908): *Ft. Carson, Colo.*

May 26

Green Acres Riding Club Horse Show (Green Acres Farm, 9700 S. 88th Ave.): *Palos Hills, Ill. 60457*

May 30-31

California Horse Symposium (Gailen Martin, Calif. Livestock Symposium, Dept. 3370, P.O. Box 37000, San Francisco 94137): *Fresno, Calif.*



• "Whoopee! I don't have to wash dishes this week 'cause my piano recital is Saturday and my teacher doesn't want me to cut my fingers!"