

Yakima Club Keeps "Old" People Riding

United States Pony Club is an awesome organization. Young riders are taught to ride, care for their equine companions, and verbalize a comprehensive horse knowledge that would do a pre-vet student justice. But get a group of Pony Club parents around, parents who are also riders, and the conversation invariably comes around to the same subject: Why isn't there a USPC equivalent for the adult rider?

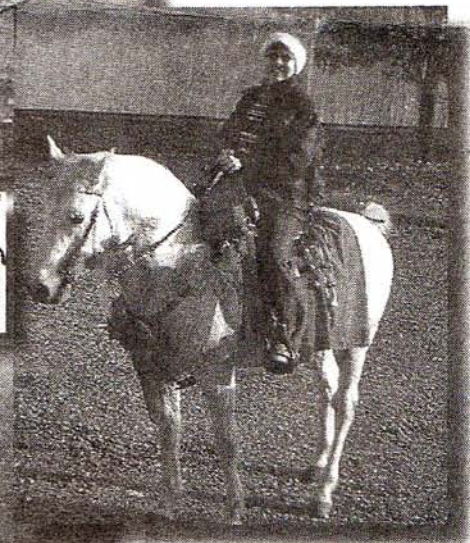
The question was asked one time too many, and in 1998, Maryland horsewoman and former Pony

and read about the newly-formed OPRC. It sounded perfect—Hope Jacob's story sounded just like her own! But she hesitated. A busy wife and mother, Lisa also taught music and ran her own sport-horse breeding business. It was impossible to take on another project...wasn't it?

Time went by and her frustrations increased, then



Club activities include Christmas carolling, wine tasting, and multi-disciplinary shows.



Club leader, Hope Jacob, started the "Old People's Riding Club." Based on the principles of the USPC, this group was created "to promote safe and enjoyable horsemanship through educational activities to anyone over the age of 21."^{**}

Unlike the USPC, however, the OPRC is open to riders from all disciplines. The OPRC began with one chapter and four members in 1998; at the end of 2006, there were 28 chapters in the United States and Canada, with nearly 800 members.

Enter Lisa Parker, herself a former Maryland foxhunter and hunter-jumper rider, who had migrated west to the cowboy country of eastern Washington. Being one of a small number of English-oriented riders in the area, Lisa longed to be part of a group that would help her attain her horse-goals. "I wanted a network," Lisa says—an educational group of like-minded people to meet with where she could share her love of horses and continue to grow as a rider. And she also wanted help with her "power" mare, Xena (aka, the Warrior Princess!)

One day she picked up a copy of *Chronicle of the Horse*



the worst happened—another article in another magazine about the OPRC! "I thought 'that's it!'" Lisa says. "I couldn't take it anymore—I had to start a chapter out here."

The Yakima Valley Chapter of the OPRC began in 2000 with eight members. At their sixth anniversary banquet in November of 2006, more than

50 members were in attendance, and enthusiasm runs high. Members come from every discipline and interest, from dressage and eventing competitors, to Western and backyard trail riders. There are even some driving enthusiasts in the group. Experience level varies widely, as well. "We have people who have ridden all their lives," Lisa says, "and at least one person in her 50's who just began riding."

To join any OPRC chapter, prospective members must be 21 years of age, agree to abide by the national bylaws, and pass the modified-from-USPC D1 rating. The D1 test is a rudimentary exam in which the rider must show basic control of his or her mount at the walk and trot, demonstrate sim-

Dawn Hill

skills such as leading at the walk, and verbalize entry-level horse knowledge. The purpose for the test requirement is to ensure that all members are equipped to ride safely in OPRC activities, and the D1 is the only rating test that is required. A member may stay a D1 throughout his or her connection with OPRC or, as do many USPC members, set a goal of working their way up the ratings.

The riding portion of the rating tests is modified for the OPRC member. A member following the traditional eventing track will discover that jump heights are not quite as high as for the Pony Club kids, and that the use of mounting blocks (for one example) is allowed. Non-jumping members may choose to rate in a dressage-only track or a Western Trail/Obstacle Course track. Each track has its own riding test, demanding comparable skills at each level.

Chapters are given a great deal of leeway in selecting the types of activities they sponsor and their educational offerings. Yakima Valley holds once-a-month meetings at a member's house which includes business and an educational session, and tries to ride together at least once a month. Regular lessons for the English rider, taught by Lisa, are offered, as well as not-so-regular lessons for the other disciplines (as with most non-profit organizations, instructor-availability is a big issue.) Clinics, both mounted and unmounted, are also offered and usually well attended.


Activity-wise, Yakima Valley members have enjoyed family trail rides, Halloween costume parties for horse and rider, and

the ever-popular, wine-tasting tour on horseback. "This is a social club," Lisa says, laughing. "Education and safety are important, but so is the social part. It's supposed to be fun!" The chapter has also put on horse shows and various "fun" rides, and supports such community groups as Columbia Basin Horse Rescue and the Pegasus Handicapped Riding Program.

As this article was going to press, members were gearing up for Christmas Caroling on horseback. Horses decked out in sleigh bells and riders in ski suits and Santa hats come together for this event. "We meet at Lisa's house, she passes out the song sheets, and off we go to visit the neighbors," relates member Rosanne Brackney. "Afterwards we head back to Lisa's for goodies, more singing, games, and a chance to rest and warm up before heading home." All in all, a fun, if chilly, activity, and a fitting end to the riding year in Yakima Valley.


"This [is] such a fun group," adds Brackney. "Everyone is willing to share what they know, and our education is ever-expanding." Lisa Parker agrees. She recently passed her OPRC C2 rating and also had the thrill of competing that "power" mare, Xena, in their first 3-day event at Donida Farm. For her, forming and participating in the OPRC has been truly "life-altering," enabling her to accomplish goals she wasn't sure she could on her own. That's what's so great about the OPRC—Learning and having fun with your horse: It's not just for kids anymore!

**For more information on OPRC check out their website at www.oldpeoplesridingclub.org.*



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