

## **A PROPOSED EDUCATIONAL PROSPECTUS FOR ALL CHAPTERS OF OPRC**

The purpose of the Old People's Riding Club is, of course, to have fun but it's also our responsibility to try to further our member's education and horsemanship skills. As adults, most of us have been riding and caring for horses for a long time but there are always new things to learn and some old things we have forgotten. There are some of us who are new to "horsekeeping" and any and all knowledge is welcome. The philosophy of any good horseman is simply that if you can't take care of your horse, you can't ride your horse!! You must know him, warts and all, in order to build the best partnership you can. This comes from caring for him and being with him on the ground: It comes from experience. As with children, husbands or friends, every horse has a different personality, good points and not so good ones. We learn to deal with all of this. The more horses we experience, the more we understand them and the more they teach us. Your best teacher will always be your horse. A lot of time must be invested in our pursuit of better horsemanship. Whether you plan to own one or many horses in your lifetime, the best chance you can give that partnership comes from the amount of knowledge you gain. This knowledge will make you more confident and, in turn, reflect itself in your partnership. The ability to spot potential health problems and deal with them accordingly, will save you time and money in the long run. It's no good waiting to call the vet when the horse has gone lame from something that could have been prevented.

When founding the Club, Hope Jacob used the model of the United States Pony Clubs. This organization, started in England in the 40's for the EXACT purpose of teaching children horsemanship skills, has flourished in a number of countries since then and is going strong today. Their methods have proven successful and useful. Today a very large percentage of Olympic riders started their careers in Pony Club. Why not follow their lead with a few modifications for adults?

As you know, NOPRC has set up a rating system. We advocate all members own the USPC Manuals and use them. We have a number of questions on the website for D's and C's. We have rating patches and certificates to reward members who achieve ratings and to let them know that, not only are their President's proud of them, but every member of the Board congratulates them on their achievements. We are all aware of the time and effort it takes to reach a certain goal. NOPRC is NOT about competition as much as it's about education but sometimes competition spurs education. Never would your Board value the first over the second.

Herein is a **yearly suggestion of educational activities** for all presidents to implement as they see fit for their members. Some will use it exclusively; some will use parts; some may not use it at all. That's fine; it's merely a suggested way to improve your member's education.

Winter activities could include the following:

**Lectures** on whatever subjects might be pertinent to your members.

**Barn demonstrations** on grooming, mane pulling, tack cleaning, clipping, blanketing, braiding, shoeing, saddle fitting, holistic medicine or whatever.

Contact your local Pony Club for older members to come and run a **Quiz (aka Knowdown)** for you. This is a question and answer game that requires studying of specific material. Usually the Q&A come directly from the PC manual but you can use any source you like. Just give your members plenty of time, access to the study material and a bottle of wine. You'd be surprised how much fun you can have on a snowy or rainy day!! You'd also be surprised at how much you can learn!!

**Field trips** to veterinary offices or hospitals can be set up. These facilities are always glad to lead tours or explain things to the public. After all, they may get some business from it.

Engage a cross- country jump **designer** or a show jumping designer to come and explain the questions that are asked on the courses they design. How are the distances set, how is the ideal time acquired (if not to be the fastest time)? What is the best design for practice fences?

After that you can have a weekend or two to **build your own fences** for practice.

Get a **Dressage judge** to come and explain to you what are the most prevalent mistakes she sees at what level. What is she looking for in a test? How should you prepare your horse for a schooling show, for a recognized show? How are these tests judged as to the point system?

Have a tack cleaning **party** or tack exchange and show videos that might be of interest to your members. Again, throw in a bottle or 12 of wine and it will be a great success. Who wants to sit and oil all that old tack (that you KNOW should be done!!) by yourself? Why not "share the misery"?

Naturally, if your chapter has access to an indoor, you can start **flat lessons** in the winter. This is also an ideal time and place to let your members ride bareback in

relative safety. You could do a **bareback gymkhana or longe members bareback**. What a wonderful way to improve your seat!

Winter is also a good time to attend to **Trailer Safety**. Have a trailer mechanic or someone that inspects this equipment come and tell you how to maintain your trailer, what to look for, and how to fix certain things. This is extremely helpful and very, very important. Who wants to see their trailer go down the highway in front of them??? Yes, it HAS happened.

**Pilates classes** are extremely beneficial. With the emphasis on core strengthening, this is essential for riding throughout the year and especially for the dressage rider. These can be set up in someone's home or at an exercise facility. The best plan is to set a series of these lessons.

**Natural Horsemanship** demonstrations are always well received, especially for those with youngsters. Of course, the older horse can often do with a "gentle" reminder to listen to mother! Again, if an indoor is available or it's a reasonable day outside, all this work is done on the ground so if it's frozen, it doesn't matter.

Well, there are **ELEVEN** things to keep your members busy for the winter months. With one exception, you haven't even been on a horse yet but you've been really busy!

Where do I find all those people to do all those things? Every President and every member has access to at least some of the elements to make these activities a success. I can't tell you specifically where to go but you can find out by asking LOTS of questions of everyone you know. Contact your local Pony Club. Don't have one, how about your local 4H? Look on websites. Dig around your community and you'd be surprised who's out there. Don't forget that most everyone you contact is in business. They are willing to do these things as it may bring them business and, at the very least, it gets their name out there. Remember the first rule of being in charge: **DELEGATE, DELEGATE!!**

Some Presidents get discouraged when a small handful of people show up for something that they have worked so hard to put on. Yes, I know, it IS discouraging but the more you demonstrate your commitment to the program, the more your membership will grow to include the type of people who will be committed to you. **NEVER GIVE UP!!**

**A VERY big element of success is scheduling.** We are ALL, without exception, tangled up with outside commitments, work, and family demands. It's a good idea to plan your meetings at a certain time each month – barring accidents. For example, meetings can be scheduled for the second Sunday of each month at 2pm. The members know to block off that time for OPRC activities. Does that always work; of course not but you can try. Un-mounted activities are thrown in whenever but lots of notice is given. You can also plan a tentative yearly schedule at your Annual General Meeting. This schedule is planned by the Board but takes into consideration the wishes of the membership. Democratic "election" of activities is a fine thing but, usually,

people want to be told. Many chapters delegate one activity to the person who brought up the subject. I've heard a lot of complaints that it simply doesn't get done as it should or it doesn't get done at all. That's not fair and a great disappointment to the rest of the membership. It also perpetuates the idea that the chapter is NOT run efficiently and the members' loose confidence. Why set aside time for an activity that may not happen? Maybe next year, I won't join again as nothing seems to be happening. Yes, Sir/ Mme. President, it DOES take time and effort to run your chapter but that's the job you signed up for! Think how wonderful it is to see a member gain confidence in herself and her horse when you have presented her with a lesson she enjoyed. How wonderful it is to see a big smile on her face!! That AH HA moment is priceless.

On to spring activities and mounted lessons:

Some chapters may hesitate implementing a mounted program due to insurance worries. As Shiela has informed you, we now have a policy for this year and, if approved a very comprehensive policy for the following year. The other option is for each chapter to obtain their own insurance. It will make everyone feel more secure.

Of course, there are **trail rides** and this is the easiest thing to arrange. A nice ride through the countryside and a picnic afterwards is a great thing. It's especially useful for green horses as there is no pressure.

**Lessons of all types** are encouraged. Flatwork, dressage, show jumping, cross-country schooling, bomb proofing, cutting and team penning: All skills to be mastered and improved upon. Try grouping your lessons in threes and attack a specific skill in that series i.e. "Mastering the Counter Canter" for example. How do you go about this? Well, there have to be instructors in your area willing to take on groups. Normally any instructor will teach as it's not only money in his pocket but it might bring outside lessons. A lesson schedule and program is not hard to set up. You can go by rating but often better riders are riding green horses so there needs to be an adjustment. You know your member's capabilities.

**Paperchases and Hunter Paces** are very popular. Yes, it's a bit more work but such fun. Both of these activities can be run as fundraisers and then the chapter can subsidize the lesson program!!

**Fix-A-Test rides** for dressage riders are very popular. In these, you ride the test of your choice; the judge comments by telling you how to improve your ride and you ride it again for her. It's sort of an instant lesson.

**Gymnastics** are the very best thing for any horse that is jumping. I don't care if he's never seen a fence before or if he's an Olympic three- day eventer. They all go back to the basics. For the rider, it's clarifying a position that may have slipped and, again, going back to basics. After a long winter one realizes that holding that two- point position for more than five minutes is a bit of a struggle!!! Gymnastics are easy to set

up and don't require a lot of equipment or space. It confirms balance, rhythm, impulsion, straightness and relaxation.

Putting on a **Summer Camp** is a lot of work but a lot of fun. You were emailed a paper on this and it's also printed on the web. It would be wonderful to see more chapters do this but I realize (oh boy, do !!!) how much work goes into it. The following years get easier.

**Horse shows**, gymkhanas, hunter trials and western competitions are all great ideas for fundraisers. They are fun for the public, get the OPRC name out there and make money for your organization.

Raising money and **giving time to local horse** rescue leagues, therapeutic riding programs and shelters are certainly worthwhile endeavors for your chapter to pursue. Not only does it make you feel good, it could win you the \$500 grant award!!

This is a long paper on a subject that is the essence of NOPRC. I hope that it tickles your imagination enough to implement some ideas. As President, you are responsible for the continuing education of your members ALONG with having fun. Isn't it more fun to learn and have fun at the same time??

Any questions or ideas: PLEASE don't hesitate to contact me. I want your input; all the Board members do. We are here to improve this National organization, your chapter and your life but we can't do that without communication, ideas, and volunteerism. Thanks for your time in reading all this.

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