

THIS IS MY HOBBY

BY BRAD TURLEY

I attended the annual USEA Conference in Colorado Springs this past December and had the opportunity to listen and talk to some of the world's greatest riders. Wow, what a place to be. The top riders in the world sharing their tips and insight. It was definitely worth the price of the ticket!

I've only been Eventing for three years and the more I learn the less I seem to know. Listening to the top riders was impressive... then befuddling... then confusing. But why? As some old guy getting into the sport late in life, I don't have enough years left to become a fraction of the rider they are.

If I'm not a professional, what am I? Officially, I'm a Novice Amateur Master rider. Unofficially, I'm not sure what I am other than always in a hurry to do something with the horses.

My "living" chips away at the "life" I wish I could lead. My living forces me to run late and finish riding early just to fit in the next conference call or meeting. Is riding my hobby?

Feeling a little discouraged, I took out the old dictionary and found "hobby" defined as "An activity or interest pursued outside one's regular occupation and engaged in primarily for pleasure." Sounds about right.

But I read on. It also noted derivations from the Middle English words *hobi* or *hobyn* meaning *small horse* or *hobby horse*. Wow, now we're getting somewhere. You mean the word hobby is related to horses? Maybe I defined myself.

I kept on looking. The Online Etymology Dictionary clarifies the origin of the word from 1298, "small horse, pony," later "mock horse used in the morris dance," and c.1550 "child's toy riding horse," which led to a transferred sense of "favorite pastime or avocation," first recorded 1676. The connecting notion being "activity that doesn't go anywhere."

That did it for me. Looks like having horses and riding as a hobby wasn't so bad after all. Horses being a means to spend money outside your normal occupation goes back nearly seven hundred years. And since I don't want to jinx history, I'm officially calling this passion I have for horses *my hobby*.

You see, I'm the guy who still has to take a minute to figure out which spur goes on which foot each day. The guy whose goal in dressage is simply not to tense up each time he enters the ring. And the same guy who just wishes his horse could count so he didn't have to worry about the whole stride thing in stadium.



So after a few conversations at the conference with other people like myself, I figured there must be others out there like me. And what does one do in the new millennium to share their experiences with others? Write a Blog, what else. One where we could share some stories, help each other figure out how to get more ride time each day and have a couple of laughs along the way.

This Blog was written for the nearly 7,000 Beginner Novice, Novice and Training riders who simply do what they do for the sheer love, exhilaration and passion that they have for their horses and this sport we call Eventing.

I hope to share some of the things I've learned while I try to become the best hobbyist I can be. And I hope you can help me, by sharing some of the experiences you have had.

WHOA DAMMIT!

BY BRAD TURLEY

So how did I become an Eventer? My story is pretty straightforward. I have an 18+ hh, 1800 lb. draft cross named Sudden Impact a.k.a. Whoa Dammit. He's a little strong, a bit forward, thinks pretty highly of himself and strikes his own path in life. I bought him about six years ago to ride trails and do an occasional hunter pace. I only got into horses about 10 years ago to ride with my daughter.

About four years ago, the local pony club asked if they could use my farm for their lessons. I liked watching the kids ride so I said, "Of course."

The Pony Club Trainer said, "That's great and thanks, but you'll have to promise to take some lessons on how to stop your horse."

Me: "Why?"

PCT: "Have you noticed that not many people want to trail ride with you anymore?"

Me: "No, I just figured everyone was busy."

PCT: "It's not that they're busy, it that people don't like to ride with a person who puts his feet on the horse's ears, pulls back on the reins and yells 'Whoa Dammit!', to stop. It is a bit frightening."

Being the considerate person that I am, and to help the pony clubbers, I agreed to some lessons on stopping Whoa Dammit. It took me about four weeks to learn how to stop him without using the fence or a wall. As I became an accomplished "stopper," the PCT said, "Now that you're getting this stopping thing down, what do you want to do next?"

Me: "I'd like to learn how to jump logs and rocks and things just in case I come across some on the trails. I think that looks pretty cool."

So over the next several months we did ground poles, cross rails and even an 18" vertical or two. WD and I were on a roll!

Just as I was thinking I was very cool, I was asked if there was a place I could go to jump some logs or something. In fact, did they have a place where you could compete in log jumping?

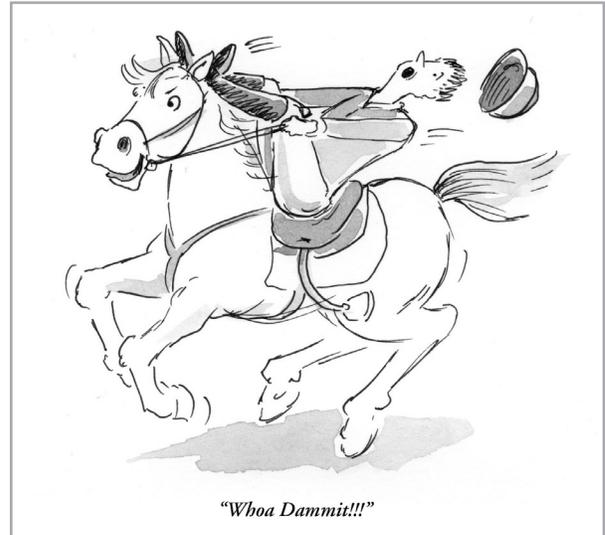
PCT: "Sure, it is called Eventing. It's a lot of fun and you really get to become a horseman."

Me: "Sounds like a winner to me, what do I have to do to start?"

PCT: "Well, you have to start learning something about Dressage . . ."

Me: "Dress what?"

The whole dressage thing set me back a little. At first, I figured how tough could it be? Two out of the three phases were jumping and I just had to pay the admission ticket with this dressage thing. And all I have to do is ride in a straight line, a couple circles and halt and make it look easy. How hard could that be? I already knew how to halt.



A few months later the pony clubbers tried to get me to ride in a schooling trial. But I was leery. I thought some old guy on a big white horse that could only trot his jumps and could only canter on a trail, might be kind of embarrassing. So I worked on cantering a jump, learned how to ride a 20-meter circle and bought myself a blue jacket. I was ready!

My first horse trial made it official. I found my new passion. It didn't matter that I didn't break 50 on my dressage (who knew that 12 meter ovals were only good for a 2 or a 3) or that Whoa Dammit was a bit strong on x-c or that I even knew how to walk and count the strides let alone ride them in stadium.

It was exciting, challenging and just downright fun. No doubt about it, I became an Eventer that first weekend in September 2004.

Over the last few years, I did learn how to do 20m circles (most of the time), have retired Whoa Dammit, added a couple of new school masters to my bag of tricks, got into a program and even learned how to walk my stadium course to count my strides (although I'm still not very good at riding them). Each day I try to ride and each day I get off feeling refreshed. Yes, I am an Eventer!

There's much more to tell, but I'd rather hear from you. Do you have a story about why you're an Eventer? How did you get your start? Can you take a moment to share it?

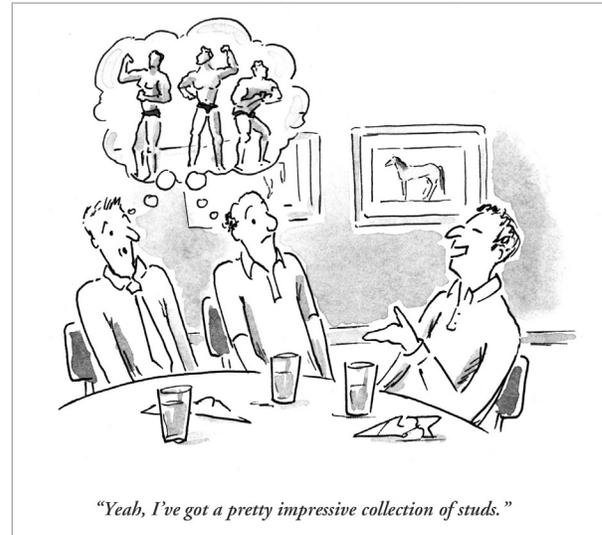
I KNOW I'M AN EVENTER WHEN...

BY BRAD TURLEY

A while back in FL at H/J Central I was coming back from the barn and stopped at the grocery store to pick up some carrots. As I was getting out of my truck an H/J type person noticed I had two saddles in the back. They asked if I was a Jumper or rode Dressage. I said, "Both, I Event? Next thing I know they ended the conversation and had to rush off to buy some radishes or something. When I told a few of my friends this story, a whole list of "I'm and Eventer because..." comments happened. So with the help of my friends, here's what we came up with. Hope you enjoy.

I Know I'm an Eventer because ...

1. My non-riding friends raise their eyebrows when I mention my stud collection.
2. After a competition I use the ice for my horse and take my drink warm.
3. I'll eat a sandwich while mucking stalls and have an energy bar while picking my horse's feet.
4. I spend hours braiding and cleaning my horse only to gallop through water and mud a few hours later.
5. I have more competition clothes than I have office wear.
6. I get away with telling my significant other that my extended daily training is good for her because it makes me a safer rider and therein will give us more time together in the future.
7. Having a decent dressage test is just the icing on the cake we call x-c.
8. I don't mind when people compliment my horse instead of me.
9. Even a bad dressage test or stadium with a rail down is better than a good day in the office.
10. Horse snot is an acceptable clothing accessory.
11. Three phases seems normal, what would I do the rest of the day if there was only one.
12. My barn is cleaner and more organized then my home or office.
13. I feed my horses more supplements than I take.
14. I am never sorry for inclement weather, as it is the great equalizer.
15. I give no thought to the amount of time and money I spend to ride for a few competitive minutes.
16. I know more about footing and soil conditions than most landscapers.
17. I love fear it makes me giggle (This is Sharky's. Guys don't giggle.)
18. I expect to be fatigued at the end of the day, and ribbons are optional.
19. Being a good horseman is more important than how I look.
20. I get to spend several days away from the office for one competition and spend quality time with nice horses and real people.



And if you can help add to the list, I'd love to hear how you know you're an Eventer.

LEARNING THE ROPES

BY BRAD TURLEY

Even with a trainer helping me learn the ropes, I found Eventing a bit confusing at first. From getting ready to compete, to packing for the competition, to arriving and warming up through each phase, it sure seemed like a lot of rules and regimen. And the clothing thing . . . I felt like a runway model. Being one that doesn't like to read user manuals, I found the Rule Book to be a bit complex.

In my three years of competing, I've seen first-hand of what some might say are potential infractions:

- No, you're not supposed to enter the dressage ring before the whistle or bell or buzzer or the judge waving her hands to go away.
- Yes, judges are a bit touchy when you don't hear the whistle or bell or buzzer and everyone in the warm up area is pointing at the judge who is jumping up and down saying it's time to enter the ring.
- No, you're not supposed to do flying lead changes at "X" in the Novice B test – even perfectly executed ones.
- Yes, it is against the rules to jump the warm up jumps in the wrong direction – in either stadium or x-c.
- No, you can't use side reins when lunging - even in the approved area.
- No, I don't recommend leaving the Stadium judge speechless because he couldn't believe that it was possible to leave out so many strides in one ride.
- Yes, men are supposed to remove their helmets when being presented with a ribbon.
- And no, having your horse escape from his stall on more than one occasion is not considered the way to meet your fellow competitors.

But even with all of my embarrassing moments, I've found most organizers, judges and TD's to be fair, helpful and courteous. Here's one of many of my "learning the ropes" experiences.

I had gone to an event my first year and remember jumping the x-c warm-up jumps in one direction. It happened to be the direction my trainer told me to jump and I remembered it. Well at least the direction, not the red on right thing. So the next year, I go back to the same event and was all excited about going out on course. My trainer turned to help someone else and I started to warm up – in the same direction as the prior year. The problem was (you guessed it) that they changed the direction that year.

As I was in mid air over my first jump, I heard the announcer say, "Will rider 100 please see the TD at the warm up exit – immediately!" Well, wouldn't you know it, I and everyone else in the warm-up knew what I did. So I sheepishly rode over ignoring all the murmurs and stares from my fellow competitors and approached the TD (without even glancing at my trainer).

TD: "Did you know what you did wrong?"

B: "Yes, I jumped the wrong direction. Am I disqualified?"

TD: "Do you know why we ask everyone to jump the same direction?"

B: "Yes, for our safety."

She looked at me for a few moments.



TD: "Are you having fun?"

B: "Absolutely".

TD: "Will you promise to never do it again?"

B: "What, have fun?"

TD: "No, jump the wrong direction."

B: "Yes, Ma'am, I promise."

Another pause

TD: "Please continue your ride and be safe."

After the event I searched out the TD and introduced myself.

B: "Do you remember me?"

TD: "Yes, you're wrong way Harry."

B: "Yea, sort of. But I wanted to thank you for being understanding and not eliminating me. I was pretty jazzed and obviously wasn't thinking. So, Thank You!"

TD: "Do you know why I let you continue?"

B: "No."

TD: "Because both you and your horse were smiling so much during warm-up, I just wanted to see what would happen once you got on course. And I have to say, I watched you out of the box and ride your first two jumps and I am certain I made the right decision. Both of you had even bigger smiles. With all the intensity of a horse trial, it is always nice to see someone just having fun. Keep it up and please, remember we want you to be safe."

BT: "No problem, Thanks again!"

Fast-forward two years to a clinic with one of the world's top riders. After the clinic, we were sitting around telling tales. I told of a few of my mishaps. Come to find out he had done some of the same things I did.

B: "Wow! What did you do?"

Top Rider: "I graciously conceded my mistakes, asked for forgiveness and got on with the job at hand. No big deal, things happen and it's all about how you deal with them."

Great advice and I continue to "learn the ropes" and (ask any of my friends) continue to inadvertently generate comical moments.

INTERPRETED DRESSAGE TEST COMMENTS

DRUH-SAHZH OR DRE-SAZH AND EUPHEMISMS /

BY BRAD TURLEY

Dressage has always been a challenge for me. From the time I heard the “dress-something,” I wasn’t sure if it was referring to my attire, my age or even how to say it.

So while the proper pronunciation might be difficult for me, the creative ways the judges comment on my riding isn’t. As a salesman, I’m experienced more than my fair share of sugarcoating. Based on what I’ve seen on my tests, judges creative use of euphemisms must be required to pass their judging exam.

I thought I would share some of the comments judges have written regarding my riding over the past few years and provide the translation (TR) for those comments. It’s taken me a while but I think I’m getting it. So for your enjoyment . . .

–“Watch not to override him with hand, sit up straighter and ½ halt more.”

TR Try to get out of the fetal position and take your hands off his ears, it might help.

–“H & R capable of much higher scores rider if develops more independent seat, leg and hand.”

TR A few basics and you’ll do better than a 50.

–“Tons of potential, a bit tense today.”

TR Congratulations, you kept him in the ring even though you had little or no control over him.

–“Steady rhythm in all paces, although slightly off at times.”

TR Yes, you did all three paces but you might want to try to only do one at a time in each part of the test. Remember free walk across the diagonal doesn’t include trot and canter as part of the movement.

–“A little more relaxed and this would have been even better.”

TR Please remember that although breathing is optional, it is strongly recommended.

–“Test was fairly good, even though horse lost balance at times (esp. during transitions).”

TR Suggest you get rid of the draft horse with size 5 shoes. Horse with smaller feet might not trip as much. Note to rider, nice job not letting him pull you over his head, seems that you’ve really practiced that one.“

–“Nicely managed.”

TR Can’t believe you were able to keep him in the ring.

–“Needs more energy.”

TR Nice try holding him back but taking eight minutes to complete your test was a little long.

–“Test started very well, then after 2nd canter he got nervous (or you did).”

TR Seems that you lost him after he saw the other horse on x-c, might want to try blinders, a little effort on the canter to a gallop downward transition might



help (pretty certain the test calls for a trot to walk downward), the cantering free walk was a first for me, interesting movement.”

–“Wicked awesome horse, challenge yourself to be more elegant.”

TR Suggest you buy your trainer a bottle of Dom for finding you this horse, maybe a new slimming jacket for you and some gloves the color of his coat (will be less difficult to see your hands move so much). Or maybe just go the elegant groom route, tux and tails with the slobber rag might be one approach.

And one that I was told about:

–“Nice brow band.”

TR None

And last but not least the one about the best judge ever - one that didn’t even make the written test (we think).

–“The rider was having a difficult time with a very nervous horse or to be more precise, a rearing horse backing into the chains. Luckily this was right in front of the judge. While I’m unsure if it was the look on the horse’s or the rider’s face, the judge got out of his truck and asked the rider if she would like him to hold her horse while she dismounted. That’s my kind of judge! (Note to reader: Rider didn’t pick up her test, just went home.)”

TR Priceless

So as you can see, while dressage has always been a challenge, I am happy that I am making progress. Initially I had no idea what the judges really meant with their comments, but lots of practice, perseverance and hard work has allowed me to instantly translate the euphemisms without even looking like I’m trying.