

SOCIAL-CLASS AND VALUE FACTORS IN SADDLE-HORSE SHOWING

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BACKGROUND

While horse shows were an integral part of early life in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia, the first evidence of a national horse show being held in New York City appeared in 1893. In the same year, a class of Kentucky Saddle horses was shown at the World's Fair grounds in Chicago. In 1915 the first world championship horse show was held at the Kentucky State Fair, where the 9-year-old *Astral King* and his rider vied for "world" supremacy in the Five-Gaited Championship Stake for more than two hours with 7 other horses. The 1979 competition for this championship took 45 minutes.

Saddle-horse riders are both amateur and professional. Amateurs range from rank novices to highly skilled riders who could vie with the professionals. The difference is that the amateur cannot be paid for training or showing horses, or gain a livelihood from it. The degree of participation for the professional depends on skill, personality, social attractiveness, and the amount of experience in the profession. The amateur's participation varies with age, sex, and ability to finance the sport. At the low end of the continuum is the farm girl with a horse she feeds, trains, and shows personally in 4-H Club competitions with very little cash expense. At the other end is the well-to-do exhibitor-owner who may have more than 200 horses, and large semi-trailer vans to transport them, with barns, a professional horse trainer, and perhaps 50 grooms. Such an exhibitor may show horses all over the United States, with a different horse to show in almost every class. The cost of such an operation varies with the salary of the trainer, the number of show horses, and the cost of their life-style while on the road at the horse shows.

At the easiest level of competition, only ribbons are awarded at the 4-H Club shows, and the young exhibitors, aged 10 to 21, must personally care for, feed, and exhibit their horses. Small town horse shows may award only \$20 as a top prize in rather easy competition. There, exhibitors work out of their own horse trailers. The better-quality shows, such as those at Cincinnati and Indianapolis, offer better prize money and trophies. The competition is greater, and the show is generally longer. Professionals

sometimes compete at these shows. They attract better horses, riders, and trainers. The best shows in the United States are the Junior League Horse Show at Lexington, Kentucky, the Kansas City Royal Horse Show, and the World Champion Horse Show at the Kentucky State Fair. These three shows attract the best horses in the United States and Canada. The trophies and prizes are much coveted. The largest stables point their show season to peak at these competitions, where a win brings much prestige and fame for the winning horse and rider. The top award is \$6000 in a United Professional Horseman class for 3-year-old horses.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Since no sociological studies are available on Saddle-horse riding and showing as a sport, a joint subjective and objective study was developed to generate both kinds of information from horse-show participants. A questionnaire administered to 102 respondents included exhibitors and spectators at the largest horse shows in Louisville, Lexington, and Kansas City; to participants at the annual meetings of breeders, such as the American Horse Shows Association, the United Professional Horsemen's Association, and the Tri-State Horse Shows Association (Kentucky, Ohio, and Pennsylvania); and at several, local, small-town horse shows. In addition, an interview was conducted with 54 professional and amateur exhibitors and owners.

The questionnaire included data on age, sex, color, education, professional status, and the number of years' participation in horse shows. Other demographic data included occupation, main source of income, and gross family income. They were asked how many horses they owned, were showing, and had placed in professional training stables. There were also questions on horse-related injuries, and the extent and duration of incapacitation, if applicable. The respondent's relative interest in other sports was also determined.

Subjective questions concerned the value of riding as a sport, the perceived honesty of Saddle-horse people and the conduct of their shows, what characteristics a good rider should have, and what

effect the pressure to win has on coaches, parents, and younger riders. Value questions concerned the male-female position in the sport, and values as to the health and psychological effects. Data on financial costs were also collected.

In the interviews, respondents were asked about their views of the social scene and the social class ramifications of horse showing. Several trainers and exhibitors were photographed. They gave their views on the rapidly changing trends in participation sports. Current societal changes and the changing economy are causing dramatic developments in horse showing as a sport and as a recreational choice.

Of the 102 questionnaire respondents, 34 were professional horse people, and 68 were amateurs. Their mean age was 32.8, ranging from age 14 to 66. The mean age at the time of the first horseback ride was 7.8 years, ranging from ages 2 to 40. The mean number of years spent riding was 21.5.

HORSE-CONNECTED INJURIES

Injuries connected with horses were suffered by 61 percent of the respondents. Damage ranged from back injuries to fractured vertebrae, ribs, noses, legs, and arms, to loss of an eye, a finger, facial disfigurement, dislocated shoulders, fractured pelvises, concussions, and internal injuries such as ruptured spleen and internal bleeding. The manner of accident inflicted by the horse included the horse throwing its head back in the rider's face, rearing up and onto the rider, scraping the rider against an obstacle, falling on the unseated rider, throwing off the rider, failure of old and defective equipment, the rider being bitten by another horse, and a car-horse collision.

In many cases, the injury occurred while the person was caring for the horse, preparing the horse for a ride, or cleaning or feeding the horse. The horse may have kicked the person, or the horse may have stepped on the person who was standing beside it. One professional was attacked in the horse stall by an angry young horse. The average length of incapacitation due to the injuries was 2.7 months.

INCOME

The family income of the respondents varied widely, but 59 percent had less than \$50,000 annual gross family income, as shown in Table 1. Income received from the horses they owned, trained, or sold showed

that half of the respondents received nothing from horses, while the other half averaged \$13,000 per year from horses. The 33 percent who were professional horse people, for the most part, made their entire living from training and dealing in horses, and some of the amateurs received moderate profit from raising and trading horses. The average number of horses owned was 25, and the respondents had been showing them, on the average, for 15.8 years. The two modal numbers of horses owned was 1 and 5, and the average number of showings per respondent in the past year was 2.7. The mean number of horse shows attended during 1978 was 10.4, and the mean number of horses currently in a training barn was 7.1, with a mode of 2. The mean current cost of keeping a horse in a training stable is \$320 per month, and the minimum cost of maintaining a horse at home on a farm that raises its own feed, with the person taking care of the animal, is \$35 per month.

OCCUPATIONS OF HORSE PEOPLE

The most common occupation reported was business and manufacturing executives. But these occupations also included farmers, housewives, piano teachers, real estate brokers, secretaries, students, doctors, lawyers, insurance agents, and a federal judge. Several said that they were retired. Riding and showing horses was the major sports interest of 87 percent of the respondents, though a few mentioned golf, jogging, and spectator sports as a greater sports interest (See Table 2).

PERCEIVED HONESTY IN HORSE DEALING

Respondents were asked to judge the general honesty in breeding, judging, selling, and trading horses (See Table 3). More than half (55%) felt that they had been cheated at some time, and 9 percent had been involved in lawsuits involving horses. The politics of horse-show judging bothered 64 percent of them, but 14 percent said that the new 3-judge system improved the situation. Despite some criticisms, 94 percent said they would want their children to participate in the sport of showing horses.

PERCEIVED VALUE OF A HORSE

There were no common expectations of what a horse should be worth, and this

could account for some of the discrepancy and value conflict in assessing honesty. Asked to specify the price, they felt a fine, sound, well-bred, safe, 6-year-old American Saddle horse should bring, as shown in Table 4, 9 percent said, "Whatever you can get." And 24 percent responded the same way when asked the proper value for a top, beautiful, and safe equitation horse for a youngster. One grandfather spent \$75,000 for his granddaughter's equitation horse. The equitation horse is in a class in which only the rider is judged.

The respondents also disagreed in the business end of buying and selling horses. In this regard, 78 percent thought the seller should give a 10 percent commission to his selling agent, but 17 percent thought that a 5 percent commission was enough. Most sellers' agents get 10 percent today, and a few get 20 percent commissions, especially when one person is agent for both buyer and seller. As for the buyer's agent, 39 percent felt that the agent should receive a 10 percent commission, and 39 percent disagreed, saying that the buyer's agent should receive no commission. They felt that only the person who hires an agent to buy or sell a horse should pay the agent, to avoid dishonesty in the dealing. And 15 percent were noticeably upset when the same person represented both the buyer and the seller.

What the respondents spent on horses per year varied from nothing to \$250,000, but 25 percent said that horses and showing expenses cost between \$31,000 and \$35,000 per year. The amount of annual income from horses varied from nothing to \$300,000. The professional horseman averaged less than \$20,000 per year.

SUBJECTIVE FINDINGS

The Saddle-horse industry has attracted people from all social classes, and it cuts across sex, race, and religion. Young women aged 10 to 21 are much more heavily represented than young men. In the older professional ranks, the sex ratio is reversed with men far outnumbering women. With amateur participants, the sexes are equal. Riding and exhibition is the favorite sport of young women. They appear well equipped to contribute to an attractive presentation. The horse and rider must be coordinated to make a smooth picture with a poetry of motion and control, with smooth muscular and mental coordination.

TABLE 1: GROSS ANNUAL INCOME

Income	Percent
\$200,001 +	33
\$ 50,001-\$200,000	7
\$ 25,001-\$ 50,000	33
\$ 25,000 or less	26

TABLE 2: WEEKLY RIDING FREQUENCY

Rides	Percent	Mean Age
Daily	36	20
2 or 3	23	31
Rarely	14	50
Never	27	38

TABLE 3: PERCEIVED HONESTY

	Breeding Business	Judging	Sales
Very honest	42%	14%	0%
Reasonable	42	55	30
So-So	11	14	35
Shakey	0	14	35
Dishonest	5	5	0

TABLE 4: VALUE OF A TOP HORSE? (Percent)

Saddle Champion		For Child's Equitation	
\$10,000	4%	\$ 5,000	19%
\$20,000	22	\$10,000	24
\$30,000	13	\$15,000	19
\$40,000	4	\$20,000	14
\$50,000	26	Maximum	24
\$60,000	22		
Maximum	9		

TABLE 5: PERCEIVED REWARDS OF HORSE SHOWING

Rewards	Percent
Meet people, make friends	85
Love beautiful horses	26
Sense of reward	26
Excitement, exhilaration	22
Winning	13
Keep family close	9
Mental & physical health	9
Aids outlook on life	7
Reward to breed winner	7
Income or profit	3

SHOWMAN QUALIFICATIONS

The respondents expressed varied opinions on characteristics of a good show rider. They mentioned ability to ride, good sportsmanship, love of the horse, understanding of horse psychology, love of the

sport, an agile alert mind, intelligence, showmanship, courtesy, versatility, even temperament, willingness to work, readiness to obey rules, and poise. A neat, slim, lithe body is also required.

Muscular coordination coupled with a strong sensitivity to the horse are prime assets. Excessive strength is not required, so the young female fits into the need for coordination and stage presence. Many interviewees mentioned that they bought their daughter a horse so she might be distracted from boys at a time when all her friends became boy-crazy, and that the distraction worked very well. For these parents, an important purpose was served, and it reaped rewards far exceeding the costs of the sport.

SOCIAL-CLASS FACTORS

Social-class patterns appear in some cases and are blurred in other cases. The general class or stratified pattern of horse shows appears from interviewee comments. Wealthier classes have finer horses, support more professional training, and attend more expensive events. But there is much crossing of the lines. And the common interest in the show horse blurs class differences and leads to crossing of class barriers.

Inter-class horse-connected marriages are not uncommon. Evidence arises from the late 1930s, when the Spintletop oil heiress married her horse trainer. Francis Dodge, heiress of the Dodge Motor family, married her trainer in the 1940s, and the brief marriage produced a daughter who later showed horses. So it was with an Oregon lumber heiress, and a California heiress, Betty Scripts, who married a trainer from a famous family of horse trainers. Cross-class marriages arouse less notice today, but they still occur. Many young women from well-to-do families marry trainers today, and many of those join their husbands in the training and stable-management business. The social-class picture is no longer clearcut in the Saddle-horse sport. Ability and interest are the more important factors, and social class is less considered.

larger training stables vary greatly. One stable employs all black grooms. Another has Mexicans. Still another will have college girls to do the daily care for the horse and clean out the stalls. Some young women grooms are the attractive daughters of extremely well-to-do businessmen who paid for their daughters to show horses as a child.

The status of trainers has also changed as the middle- and upper-class young women take such jobs. Upper- and middle-class college graduates joined the ranks of trainers because that is what they wanted to do. Trainers in the sample include a judge's son and the daughter of a wealthy manufacturer. They report varying degrees of parental shock when their parents learned of the son's or daughter's choice of horse training as a life career.

SATISFACTION

The horse riders' reasons for riding and showing horses are the physical, mental, and spiritual benefits they derive, as listed in Table 5. Despite the high injury rate and the large percent that feel cheated or questioned the honesty of the horse shows, 99 percent mentioned that they would continue with the horse-showing sport as long as possible. As one said, "The good far outweighs the negative. I enjoy the people I meet, and I enjoy seeing a good horse perform. Being a breeder, it is especially rewarding to see horses I've bred, raised, and sold, doing well in the show ring." Another liked the fact that there is no age barrier between younger and older people in horse showing. Many mentioned the rewards of a personal sense of advancement or achievement. While the physical and mental rewards gave a great sense of achievement, the costs were often mentioned as deterrents from enjoying the sport as much as they might have liked. The average rider, interviewed just after showing, was very elated, very wet with perspiration, and very thirsty. They exert a great deal of emotional and physical energy in showing their horses in the competition.

STATUS OF GROOMS & TRAINERS

In the 1930s, men who groomed horses were mainly black men, but with the Black Power movement and the short supply of laborers, the horse grooms today at the