

EQUESTRIAN ORGANIZATION FORMED

TO DEVELOP SPORT OF WORKING EQUITATION IN NOVA

By Michelle Baker

Northern Virginia supports many communities laden with horses and equine activities making the area perfect for the addition of the new Northern Virginia Working Equitation (NOVAWE) organization.

Working Equitation (WE) is a hot new sport in the U.S.

While WE is prevalent on the West Coast, its popularity is spreading East and NOVAWE organizers Elizabeth "Biddie" Lowry of Gainesville, Diane Hutchinson of Leesburg and Laura Guillaudeu of Hillsboro are teaming to help the sport's growth along.

NOVAWE is a new non-profit member organization with a mission to promote growth of this exciting equestrian sport through education and mounted events. WE has origins in European and South American ranch work, and the sport welcomes all breeds and disciplines to participate in its dressage-based, approach to arena obstacle execution.

There aren't yet many WE shows in the Northern Virginia area, but NOVAWE is working to change that. Lowry, who is the current president for the organization, put on two play days, four clinics and one Ease of Handling Schooling Show in Prince William and Loudoun Counties over the last year. Lowry's popular Facebook page, Northern Virginia Working Equitation, has a strong following with more than 250 members. She posts useful and instructive information to help riders interested in WE, including information on how to join NOVAWE.

The club has a website under construction. The www.NOVAWE.org site will be a portal for nonmembers and members alike.

"The best part about learning WE is it's fun for both horse and rider and therefore a favorite for cross training all horses, from trail horses to Grand Prix dressage horses and top jumpers, as well as Western style horses," said Diane Hutchinson. "The mental challenge of obstacle work provides the horse a welcome change from his regular work – most horses embrace the obstacles happily."

Learn how to navigate the 22 different WE obstacles and understand the ample rules of WE before attempting a WE show. NOVAWE will provide local riders with opportunities to learn and to improve their horsemanship and



precision through WE practice opportunities like play days.

For those that develop ambitions for WE competition, NOVAWE will prepare members for the three phases called "trials," said Diane Hutchinson. First, riders learn to ride a WE dressage test, followed by an area obstacle course where each of at least 10 obstacles, and the transitions between them, are scored with value between 0 to 10, plus collective marks. A third trial is the obstacle course ridden for speed, fastest time wins, penalties get converted to seconds.

The founders want to reach younger riders, too. The Children's Level as well as the Intro Level (Level 1) are Walk-Trot levels and do not participate in the Speed Trial, but Levels 2 through 7 do participate in the Speed Trial.

A WE show can offer a fourth trial, the Cattle Trial. This is a team event working with cattle and can also be offered for individuals.

Dressage (which literally means training) work is important for any horse said Hutchinson. Couple dressage with obstacle execution,

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the results will be increased precision, useful in any discipline – from foxhunting to show hunters. Transitions become crisper, and navigation improves.

"WE is great cross training for all horses, including those who ride in other obstacle and pattern competitions from Judged Pleasure Rides to Ranch Riding," said Hutchinson.

"My horse, who I compete in lower level United States Dressage Federation (USDF) dressage schooling shows, loves to walk into an arena and see the WE obstacles," she said. "Her ears go up, and I know she is thinking 'Oh boy, obstacles, fun!'" Hutchinson has competed in two rated WE shows, but both were over a three-hour distance away. She is anxious to help grow the sport right here in her Loudoun County and the surrounding areas. "With such a large and active sport horse community where we live, we can support and offer numerous WE events locally."

Guillaudeu agrees. She was introduced to WE through Tri-State Riding Club who offered some WE lessons last year. "I've been hooked ever since, and I've ridden in every

event NOVAWE has put on," she said, adding that she is excited to help NOVAWE advance WE by volunteering to serve as its membership coordinator. "Many folks NOVAWE introduced to WE through play days and clinics feel the same – they love WE and want to do more," said Guillaudeu.

Truly WE has something for just about everyone. "It is so fun, first of all. My mare Skye loves it!" said Adair Soho, who rides a reining mare. "I never started with Working Equitation thinking it would become my thing, but I love it and my horse loves it," she explained. "And I love all the wonderful and supportive people I've met." Soho's Another Turn Tack Shop in Purcellville, has joined NOVAWE as a business member. Soho participates in mounted events and represented NOVAWE in July at the rated WE Eastern Region Andalusian Horse Club (ERAHC) show at Birchtown Stables in Forest City, PA where she won the Level 1 Intro Amateur Grand Championship.

All six of the NOVAWE riders that attended the July Pennsylvania WE show were successful. Lowry won the Novice A Amateur Dressage and Ease of Handling trials on her

registered Quarter Horse Oliver Red Tari. She accredits the NOVAWE team's success to their thorough preparation and knowledge of WE, something NOVAWE stresses in its clinics.

"I can't thank Allison Reed of Bella Vita Stables in Catharpin, Virginia enough for her instruction and training at all of the clinics," said Lowry. Reed is a regular NOVAWE clinician/trainer and has coached all the NOVAWE riders.

"I'm proud the NOVAWE riders were so well prepared and successful in Pennsylvania," said Lowry, who is already busy coordinating more practice days and clinics for NOVAWE riders to prepare for the next rated show coming up at the Virginia Horse Center on August 24-25. ML

Page 34: Top: Biddie Lowry of Gainesville, rides Oliver Red Tari and carries a garrocha pole during the second Working Equitation trial, called Ease of Handling, whereby riders are judged on the accuracy and smoothness in which they navigate the obstacles. Bottom: Laura Guillaudeu of Hillsboro, rides her horse Dreamer over the bridge. Photos by Shannen Johnson.

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