

# Horse Show Veteran

By Bob Goddard, Equine Humorist

I am a horse show veteran. My horse-crazed daughters suffer from an addiction to riding in public, so I don't have much choice. My efforts to break them of this expensive habit routinely fail and I'm left to spend my weekends and their inheritance on this ... sport.

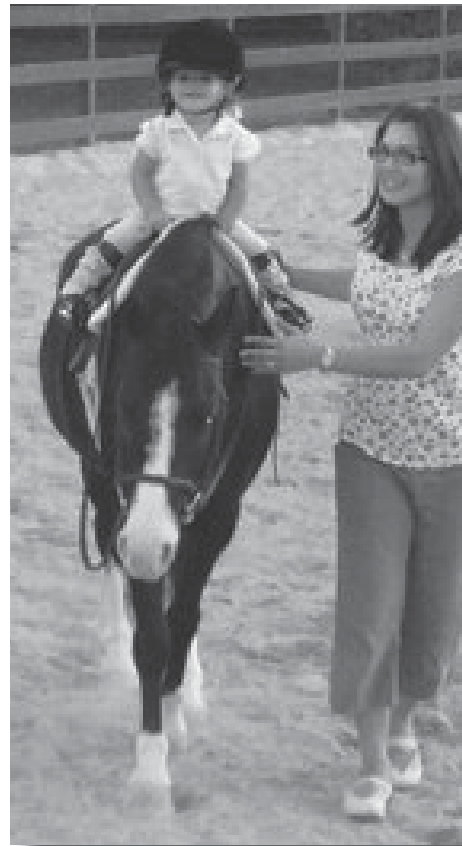
We've attended over a hundred horse shows. And we'll probably go to a hundred more before it's over and they cart me away on a broken down sulky, babbling a litany of judge's instructions: "Trot your horse, trot please ... reverse and walk ... canter your horses ... run like the wind! ... every rider for herself! ... line up and face judgment!" I'll need to be sedated.

When the girls first started competing, I had no idea what was going on. All I could see was a herd of horses with miniature, but well-dressed riders going in circles. How the judge picked one rider over another was beyond my comprehension. They weren't racing, that was for sure. But to help pass the time, I pretended they were.

Now, I'm a veteran. I still don't understand what the judge is looking for, but at least now I know that nobody else does either. Not parents anyway. Many get angry, and even feel cheated or insulted when their child does not place. Over the years, I've learned the louder they protest, the less they know.

New parents - the rookies - are the worst. Rookie parents are shocked and dismayed when they first discover the role politics and popularity play in horse show placings. "What do you mean the judge is a close friend of Suzy Tengrandhorse's parents? That's not fair!" Yeah, neither are death and taxes.

Of course one's view of the role of politics in placings directly corresponds to the color of ribbon one receives. Those taking a blue



know the judge is a direct descendant of Solomon - or a least a shirttail cousin of Judge Judy. Those who receive lesser ribbons or no ribbon at all regard the judge as about as fair and impartial as a Tyrannosaurus Rex.

There are other ways to spot rookie parents. They're the ones whose kids have bloodstains on their back numbers. There is a trick to pinning thin stock cardboard to

fabric and it takes a few finger pricks before you learn it. Safety pins are dangerous.

Rookie parents hurry. Then they wait. Then they hurry. Then they wait. They do this because they have yet to comprehend the salient fact of horse shows: Nothing ever happens on time. Most horse shows are behind before they even start. Rushing to meet a deadline that never comes on time always results in hurrying followed by waiting followed by hurrying and so on.

Veterans know better than to get ready for a class too early. Scurrying around to get the proper tack, the right clothes, and correct equipment ready to go forty-five minutes prior to a class is never a good idea. The horse gets tired, the kid will have to pee and sweat makes mascara run. Daughters of rookie parents sometimes look like Alice Cooper groupies.

One of the worst mistakes I see rookie parents make is letting people - especially club leaders and kids - see them sit down. Veterans do not allow this. A veteran knows that the instant his or her rear makes contact with a chair, a club leader or child will descend upon the sitting person with a list of chores and instructions. Sitting areas should be chosen with care and out of public view. I prefer exploring and colonizing small patches in adjoining cornfields whenever possible.

Veteran horse parents do not have fewer questions than rookie horse parents. We've just stopped asking them. We have learned that knowing something is the first step to having to do something. It's best to remain confused and oblivious. Just because the horses go around and around, doesn't mean we need to.

