

WHOSE VAULT IS THIS?

BLAME THE GERMANS...AGAIN

By Bob Goddard

While browsing the web recently, I came across a remarkable photograph. It showed three children dressed in tights, riding triple on a horse. Not only were they riding triple, they were every which-way. One youngster sat backwards and another was standing up. The third kid – the crazy one – was upside down and on top of the one sitting backwards. She wasn't even bothering to hang on with both hands.

Where were these kids' parents? This is the kind of show-off monkey business I forbid my daughters to do when they were still under my roof. It was tough enough watching them jump cross poles. Doing a hand stand on top of a moving horse was completely out of the question.

According to the caption, the insane children were engaged in sport/art called vaulting. I've heard of vaulting before. At least the word. But I assumed it involved jumping over things. As in "pole" vaulting.

Webster supports me in this. "To bound vigorously," he says. Oxford agrees. Both dictionaries mention a "burial chamber" and that could be relevant. But there is *nothing* about doing back flips off a real horse.

I called my now-grown daughter, Hiliary, to see if she could offer some insight to this madness. And to make sure she wasn't doing anything unsafe.

"It's a sport, Dad. Like gymnastics on a horse."
"Gymnastics on a horse? Who the hell thought *that* was a good idea?"

"I think it first came from Germany. But we've been doing it here for a long time. It's kinda cool to watch."

The Germans. Again. I'll add it to the list.

"You haven't done this sort of thing, have you Hiliary?"

"No – never. It's not something you can just go out in the backyard and start doing. You have to go to a trainer or join club or something. I know that there's a national organization. Try going to www.americanvaulting.org

I went to www.americanvaulting.org. Hiliary and I surveyed the website together over the phone. A father-daughter conversation utilizing 21st Century technology. Oh, brave new world.

I clicked on the photo album page link. "Hiliary, check out the photos. Don't you think some of them are kinda young?"

"Yeah, they're young. It's the same for regular gymnastics."



"Okay, now click on the awards link. Do you see where most of the kids are from?"

"Yeah... looks like California."

"That's right. Young people from California."

Now things were starting to make sense. This is not the sort of thing we do in Michigan. Performing fancy tricks on top of a moving horse just wouldn't go well with huntin', fishin' and cursing at professional sports teams. But in California, well...

"Actually, Dad, they have chapters all over the country. There's one about twenty miles from here."

"Hiliary, these people are out of their minds. Why stop at handstands? Why not just go ahead and start a hockey game up there?"

"It's not that dangerous. They do all kinds of things to make it safe."

"Such as?"

"Such as a longeur controls the horse, not the performers. And it's not like the horses are running all over the place while the vaulters are doing this stuff. It's a very controlled environment."

"And?"

"And they use a special saddle. I don't think they even call it a saddle. And they use specially trained horses. This isn't something you can do on a trail horse with a western saddle."

"Yeah, Waders would freak out. I can see him looking back at you wondering what the heck you're doing up there. Still, in some of the pictures they're fifteen feet up in the air. And they don't hang on."

"That's true. But the people in those pictures have something very important going for them."

"What's that?"

"They know what they're doing."

"I could see how that might help."

"They're FEI level athletes. They've been taught by FEI level trainers. At the lower levels it's almost a lead-line sort of thing. And vaulting at any level teaches things that make regular riding safer."

"Like what?"

"Like balance and rhythm."

And it builds confidence by teaching riders to control their own bodies. A horse will notice that."

Okay. I give up. Vaulting is safer than softball or bike riding or joy riding in grocery carts. And apparently horses like it too. I can understand that. Anything that gets these crazy kids to control themselves has got to be a good thing.

Bob Goddard is a freelance writer from Ravenna, MI. His book, "Horse Crazy!, A Tongue-in-Cheek Guide to Parents of Horse Crazy Kids," is available for purchase from Dog Town Press.

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