

What is Vaulting?

(and why you might want to try it)

By Deb DeVries, Blue Sky Vaulters Coach

Vaulting is the SAFEST equestrian sport of all horse-related activities. It has been shown to be statistically safer than even trail riding. I cannot tell you how many times I've heard people say that vaulting is dangerous or unsafe, but this is entirely untrue!

I have always used the lunge line as a way to introduce riders to horseback riding. They must first learn balance without gripping and be free to use their hands for something other than holding on. I bought my first vaulting surcingle about 10 years ago to use for that purpose; it cost \$200 from Libertyville Saddle Shop. I didn't use it as much as I could have because I didn't really know what else I could do with it.

Most of my students learned bareback on the lunge line and once they could trot several times around the circle without gripping or grabbing the horse, they earned a saddle. It may surprise you to hear that

very few riders ever fell off while learning this way. Again, the safety of vaulting comes through....

The definition of "Equestrian Vaulting" is officially that it is a combination of dance and gymnastics on a moving horse. Vaulting has evolved from more than just a training tool, into a sport, and it will be introduced at the World Equestrian Games (WEG) in Kentucky next year; I hope to be there with my horse, *Mon Coer*, if there is sufficient interest in using him there. More on the horse later...

While dance and gymnastic training are helpful, they are not required. The skills learned while vaulting build on themselves as the vaulters progress. This is why vaulting is such a wonderful mechanism for Therapeutic Riding Programs. Our top Walk Level vaulter has absolutely no dance or gymnastics skills, but she has great balance and lots of imagination which helped her to win against other more "fit" vaulters.

Recreational Vaulting is a great way to start new riders and create a real group/team atmosphere at the barn. The American Vaulting Association (AVA) has just introduced this new membership category for those wanting to join but not go full tilt into competition. For \$15 you can get all the benefits of a full membership except that you are not eligible to compete at an AVA recognized competition. For us in Iowa that is not much of an issue since we don't have any AVA recognized competitions offered. If we were interested in competing, travel to Michigan for the regional shows would be necessary. This brings me to the next great point about vaulting.

In vaulting, one horse can carry many vaulters since they are cycling on and off of the horse. In competition, as many as 18 vaulters can use the same horse in a day. There is an official limit of 36 goes in a day/horse. If each rider competed in both compulsory and freestyle routines, that would make 18. Imagine splitting the cost of taking one horse for multiple competitors! This significantly reduces the cost of competing and makes it more affordable for many more people.

Another plus for the trainer/coach is that the tack fits all riders; one surcingle is all that is required, so for the price of one good quality saddle you can again teach multiple



students. My surcingle with pad and side reins cost \$1800 used; I priced the surcingle alone at \$1800 new. The special vaulting pad for competition costs around \$300 but you could get by with an oversized extra-thick western pad or two for recreational use.

We also use a vaulting barrel to teach the moves and to work with positioning so that the vaulters learn how to be soft on the horse. There are directions on the AVA website for building your own barrel, or you can buy a competition barrel already made for anywhere from \$400 to \$700.

The AVA has started a couple of new





programs to help encourage trainers to offer vaulting. One is a Train-the-Trainer Workshop, which is aimed at teaching current and aspiring trainers how to start a vaulting program or to incorporate it into their current program.

Another incentive to get trainers started is that they are offering to rent a surcingle set to new programs for \$100 for six months. After the six months, the surcingle is returned so another group can try it out.

My hope is that a few barns in Iowa would be interested in starting a program and that eventually we could offer some competitions here in this half of our region. Currently, the AVA is offering to help us break our region which consists of 14 states, extending from Michigan on the north, east to Kentucky and West Virginia, west to North Dakota and South Dakota, and south to Missouri, into sub-regions. We are in the process of trying to see just where the interest is so we can draw some lines in the sand. Most of the states on this side of Lake Michigan have only one club so there is definitely room for growth if we can get the word out about this great sport.

Next spring we will be at the Midwest Horse Fair with one of the country's top vaulting clinicians, Nancy Stevens-Brown. She is an amazing force for vaulting and very entertaining and informative. She has been the commentator for Vaulting Nationals for many years and also for the Vaulting CVI that was debuted at the Kentucky Horse Park this last summer. Plan to see us if you can!

For more information about vaulting you can contact the American Vaulting Association at www.americanvaulting.org or my website at www.cfequestriancenter.com.

We'd be happy to come to your barn or club activity and give a hands-on demonstration.

Photos Courtesy of Amanda Stump / Kaprys Photography
<http://olivetto.wordpress.com> · <http://olivetto.etsy.com>



Photos:

Far Left: Kylie McCaughey, 2009 Celebration Series II Walk Freestyle Champion performing the Star on Mon Coer at the walk.

Center: Originality is most of the fun when designing a freestyle. Kylie is trying a new hanging stag move on Mon Coer at our Oct. 24th demonstration.

Right: Lauren Berger, 2009 AVA National Open Freestyle Champion on the Barrel, performing the flag compulsory move. The barrel is used to teach correct position.