

Kid's KOrner

Life Of A Country Kid

Many of us dream of riding or owning a horse or our own. A horse and rider galloping across an open field appears elegant and effortless. However, Claudia Hartzler, 10, says a well-trained horse and rider makes everything look easier than it really is.

Claudia, daughter of Jeff and Gwen Hartzler, Mount Joy, is a second year member of the Lancaster County Boots and Saddles 4-H Club. As anyone who has ever ridden knows, it takes hours of hard work for both horse and rider to travel in harmony. Claudia takes riding lessons and practices regularly with her mare, Jessica.

A partnership needs to be developed between horse and rider. Riding is two-way communication. Horse and rider share a special language that both need to learn. There are certain aids a rider uses to help the horse understand what to do. A simple walk can be uncomfortable and dangerous for horse and rider if one does not understand the language.

A rider's hands on the reins are the most obvious aids. According to Claudia, a rider with "good hands" is one that hardly uses them. Hands should never be used alone, but always in combination with leg and seat aids. For example, by applying pressure with her legs, Claudia controls the pace and

hindquarters of her horse.

A well-schooled horse has been trained to understand and respond to pressure from the rider's legs, seat and hands. Through the use of these aids, Claudia can control her horse's movements. A good rider learns to sit upright, relax and keep the horse balanced. By using the aids correctly, the rider earns a horse's trust. A horse can sense an inexperienced rider and often will not respond properly.

Most people just ride for pleasure. As some riders progress with their riding skills, they look for challenges. Equestrian events test a rider's horsemanship and a horse's ability. One advantage of equestrian events is riders can compete at different levels. The older and more experienced riders become, the tougher they are judged on how they control their horses.

Once riders have mastered their horses, they often learn to jump fences and other obstacles. The excitement of top-level show jumping is hard to beat.

Sports such as hunting, cross-country riding, racing, and polo provide horse-lovers with many opportunities. These events provide pleasure and competition, but can be dangerous. You need to be a competent rider. This takes hours of practice and dedication.

Right: Before boarding the trailer to the District 4-H Horse Show, Claudia Hartzler lets her horse, Jessica, grab an early morning snack.



Below: Claudia gets a few riding tips from her older sister, Kim, while warming up for the 4-H District Show.



Right: With her horse's tail and mane braided, Claudia Hartzler takes time to brush down Jessica's coat before putting on the saddle.

In the ring, Claudia does her best to show her horsemanship skills she spent practicing at home.