

Horses 101: Expert suggests lessons before buying a horse

By Elizabeth Marie Himchak

What parent has not heard at some point “I want a horse” from their child or teen?

With all the horses on display during the Poway rodeo and parade, for the next several weeks local parents will likely be hearing that phrase a lot more often.

They might even be tempted to give in to the pleas of their aspiring equestrian.

But before plunking down \$1,000 or more to buy that horse with the beautiful big brown eyes and long-flowing tail, parents should first enroll their child in horseback riding lessons or horse camp.

That's the advice of Stephanie Kicinski, who with her



PHOTO BY JOHN GREENWOOD

Decorating their hair and horses' manes with bougainvillea found on a trail ride are Jeremy's Ranch students Zoe Harris (left) with Teddy, a Welsh pony; and Emma Hobscheid with Charlie, an Arabian horse.

husband, John Greenwood, opened Jeremy's Ranch in Poway 21 years ago and have owned horses for the last 32 years.

She said parents spending \$210 for five one-hour sessions at her English riding school is a lot less expensive than spending thousands of dollars on a horse, boarding, veterinary and other fees only to learn a few weeks later that their child's interest was a passing fancy.

“They need to realize it's not like having a really big dog,” Kicinski said. “They need to devote two to three hours a day (caring for and exercising) the horse.”

“When they're still in school, they should be focused on having (good grades) instead.”

She said rather than buying a horse, it is best to take riding lessons at a training facility, such as hers, which lets students use its horses who are used to being around children and inexperienced riders.

Students learn not only how to ride, but also care for a horse, since they are taught about grooming, feeding, cleaning stalls and horse health.

Kicinski said students should be at least 8 or 9 years old and a minimum of 50 pounds. This is because they need to be old enough to understand and follow directions, lift a saddle — English saddles are about 14 pounds, Western saddles are about 40 pounds — and physically strong enough to make the horse do what its rider wants.

Her students are taught English riding — a style used in all types of equestrian events outside the rodeo arena. At the rodeo, Western riding — and its heavier saddle — are preferred due to the nature of the tasks, such as rounding up cattle.

Kicinski said if someone develops a true love of horses — and has the money and time to care for them — purchasing a horse is an option and potentially decades-long commitment.

She said there are several types, including Thoroughbreds (type one sees at the racetrack), American quarter horses (named because they were bred to run a quarter-mile), Welsh ponies, Arabians, Morgans and Appaloosas (ridden by Native Americans for centuries).

Kicinski and her husband own several types, but her favorite, especially for new riders, is the American quarter horse due to its typically calm and sensible personality.

She also advises people to adhere to the saying “An old rider for a young horse and an old horse for a young rider.”

In this case, an “old horse” is at least 10 years old, by which time it is “sensible, not fast nor spooks easily, and does not try to be wicked.”

Unless one is extremely experienced, she said never buy a horse that is not yet broken, nor adopt one whose lineage is not known. Adopting a retired race horse is an option, since these horses are well-trained, but have to be taught to run slower.

In the current economy, Kicinski said a good horse can be purchased for \$1,000 to \$1,500. Prior to purchase, the buyer should have its veterinarian do an exam — about \$500 — and never rely on the seller's veterinarian since drugging a horse to make it appear calm or to cover medical problems is possible.

The medical exam includes the heart and legs, the latter can be prone to arthritis, Kicinski said. Just because a horse can live 25 to 30 years, it does not mean it can be ridden to that age, she added.

Other expenses to keep in mind are boarding (which can include food, water and stall mucking) — \$300 per month; shoes (replacement and care) — \$600 annually; veterinarian fees of at least \$1,000 annually “depending on how lucky you are” and training — \$300 per month.

Kicinski said there are many benefits to riding horses. Besides learning how to ride and care for an animal, riding is a good form of exercise.

“There is a lot of physical effort to riding ... you have to squeeze your legs ... and move around a lot — like skiing or snowboarding,” she said. “The more you put into it, the more you get out of it.”

She said one reason many people love horses and horseback riding is because “(Horses) can be the sweetest, mildest, gentlest animals who they let you ride them, even though they could kill you in a heartbeat.”

For information about Jeremy's Ranch, go to www.jeremysranch.com or call 858-679-1168. ■