



Halleck Creek Therapeutic Riding

Nestled deep in a valley about two and a half miles just east of Nicasio Square, Halleck Creek Ranch is a historic 60-acre ranch surrounded by hundreds of acres of West Marin rolling hills, open meadows and the shade of conifer trees.

Halleck Creek Ranch is dedicated to improving the lives of disabled Bay Area youth and adults by providing low-cost individual and group therapeutic horseback riding programs. Approximately 90% of the riders are children and youth ages 3-21 who come to Halleck Creek Ranch with a wide range of physical, developmental, and sensory disabilities, such as Cerebral Palsy, Down syndrome, Autism, and Muscular Dystrophy. Most riders receive scholarship support and no rider is turned away due to lack of funds. The ranch relies on the donations of caring individuals and foundations. HCR is the only therapeutic riding facility in the Bay Area to offer trail riding—a truly life-changing experience for people with disabilities who otherwise might not be able to access nature in this way.

Through its unique physical movements, animal-human bonds, and adventurous nature, therapeutic riding helps disabled individuals gain the skills needed to live independent, healthier lives. Riding programs build the physical strength, coordination, self-confidence, and social skills needed to reduce stress, increase co-ordination and improve each rider's quality of life, allowing them to reach their full potential, both now and long into adulthood. Riding helps develop core muscles, improving the rider's strength and coordination to sit, stand, or walk independently. Riding also helps develop better hand strength, coordination, and self esteem. The ability to form a bond {continued on page 5}

Buying the Right Horse the First Time

As a trainer and professional rider, I cannot tell you how many horses have come to me because the owner purchased a horse and then a few months (or weeks) into it realize they are in way over their head. The horse may be too young, have horrible manners, look pretty but the personality doesn't match, they wanted to "save" one, not work in a suitable manner for the intended purpose, etc. Lo and behold their trainer can get on the horse and everything is fine, but when it is time for the new owner to get on, the anxiety kicks in because of the anticipation of another unpleasant ride. It's just not a fun place to be.

While I have received many horses and riders in this predicament, I've also had experience in purchasing horses correctly suited for my clients' needs. The perfect match is so fun to see blossom and succeed! The following are some tips and guidelines to help potential buyers find the right horse the first time!

Enlist the help of a professional! I cannot stress this enough. By arming yourself beforehand with as much knowledge as you can, and with the aid of your knowledgeable horse person, you'll be able to sort through the horses you look at and determine which will be a good match, and which won't. The best is to use the trainer you plan to work with in the future because they will have a vested interest in your success as well. There is typically a commission fee to be expected in the professional's pursuit and purchase of a horse, but it is a small price to pay compared to the devastation of coming home with the wrong match!

Always get a second opinion. If you took the advice above of bringing a professional with you, that's wonderful, but I recommend a second opinion from a friend as well as at least second try yourself. My trainer, Christine Rivlin (USDF Gold Medalist and experienced horse buyer in the US and Europe), warns "It's easy to buy something on impulse and let emotions take over. You might make a decision you regret later". We've all fallen in love at first sight, but with an objective other opinion it will help to keep a clear head.

"Isn't a young horse a better investment than an older horse?" If you still dare use the word "investment" and "horse" in the same sentence, you probably haven't had enough years in the industry. Unless you are a well-experienced rider or trainer and can move a horse along the levels of training quickly, you may find yourself and your horse stuck at a certain level, where the horse's value does not increase nor does your riding. The best option for the amateur horse owner is to get a horse which you can learn on as well as having it in a training program to further its education. We all want to get on and go when we purchase a riding age horse, and often are over matched when buying a young horse.

When talking to a seller, ask tons of questions! Pick the current owner's brain (and previous owner's if possible). Ask about health, soundness, how the horse stands for farrier and veterinarian, temperament, exposure to various situations such as dogs, children, other horses, experience, show records, current condition, vices, does it load and trailer well, is it registered. Ask his or her best quality and worst quality or worst behavior. Discuss the horse's conformation for your intended purpose (this is also helpful with a professional and veterinarian), quality of gaits, size, and just about anything else you can think of.

Test the horse out in environments similar to where you will be riding. If your prospective horse lives in a place where there is only arena, and you want to trail ride, discuss the option of the seller hauling the horse to a place with trails (maybe go for a ride together). Another example, if you are looking for an eventer ready to show, make sure you can see the horse through water, over ditches, solid fences as well as in a dressage court and show jumping arena. {continued on page 5}

AT THE BARN

Also see the horse in its home. Does he get along with neighboring horses? Is he an alpha personality? How does he or she react during feeding time? A horse that kicks the walls is prone to injury.

Finally: Always, always, always have a pre-purchase veterinary examination done on the horse you have decided meets all your other requirements. I highly recommend clients have any age horse radiographed (x-rays) as part of the exam. As well as a physical and soundness examination, a good veterinarian will also further discuss your intended purpose and the suitability of the horse to your needs.

Remember, no horse is perfect. They all have some shortcomings that are not always apparent to the prospective buyer. Occasionally a seller will allow a trial period away from their farm. If this is an option, expect to assume financial responsibility for a potential loss or injury, and a written agreement should address the concerns of both parties and be agreed upon. If a trial cannot be arranged, work out several visits to evaluate the horse over several days or weeks, and bring a video camera. Keep in mind not to let this time go for a long time as a courtesy to the seller, but a methodical approach will demonstrate your commitment as a serious buyer.

Still not sure you are ready to buy? Leasing a horse is a wonderful option to prepare you for the responsibility involved, without the expense of the purchase.

And remember to have fun!!!! - Erin King Jackson is head trainer of **All The Kings Horses and Rockin' Ponies** riding program located in Marin County.

Looking Back: San Geronimo Valley Horse Shows

There aren't many of us who remember the San Geronimo Valley Horsemen's Association, which dates back to the late 1950s. Grace Dickson Tolson was a charter member, and remembers winning a trophy in gymkana on her horse Bo D on their first time out! Grace was a teenager!

The SGV Horsemen's Association had a lot of members, and built a giant arena on leased land where Creekside Stables is now. The large arena {continued on page 6}



The best show jumper around! Chuck Tolson at Dickson Ranch, 1979.

{continued from page 4} and interact comfortably with horses increases the rider's ability to trust, and in the long term improves personal relationships.

HCR's therapeutic riding program also supports the families of its riders. The ranch offers families the opportunity to socialize and network with one another in a welcoming environment, and gives families peace of mind as their children gain critical life skills, become more independent, and make new friendships. In addition, HCR's riding programs builds important connections between the disabled and non-disabled communities, giving volunteers the opportunity to interact with youth who have disabilities. Through their experiences, volunteers gain valuable perspective on their own abilities, develop stronger interpersonal and leadership skills, and discover the unique joy of helping others.

Halleck Creek Ranch pioneered therapeutic riding, "opening its doors to the great outdoors" in 1977, using the four strong legs of a horse. The organization began with the vision of Duane Irving and Joyce Goldfield who, through their work at the National Park Service Morgan Horse Ranch at Point Reyes National Seashore, realized that a gentle horse could easily carry children who use wheelchairs into outstanding natural areas, allowing them to experience the unique sense of freedom and mobility of horseback riding therapy.

Mr. Irving and Mrs. Goldfield created a special environment where disabled children could experience life without barriers for the day. They taught volunteers to treat the special riders as their friends and peers, creating true and lasting friendships. For the past 13 years, the Executive Director of Halleck Creek has been Julie Cassel, who recently retired. Barbara Hill is the new Executive Director, and can be reached at 415.662.2488 or bhill@halleckcreekranch.org.

Over 160 children with disabilities from Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, Solano, and Sonoma Counties are able to attend the weekly therapeutic riding program, including both Group Riding and Individual Riding Sessions. To volunteer, donate or find more information go to their website www.halleckcreekranch.org.

- Carol Whitmire