

What are "seat lessons"?

I am apt to spend more time than Jim on the rider's position, teaching him/her how stiffness, tension and imbalance affect the movement and well being of the horse. Riders delight in my lunge lessons - where I control the movements of the horse in a circle around me. The rider is free to devote all of his/her attention to his/her position in the saddle.



I see developing the rider on the lunge line as similar to sculpture. I have a specific idea of what I want to accomplish and I work with the rider to develop the flexibility and strength to attain that picture.

Much of the flexibility and balance I am trying to achieve relates to beauty, poise and relaxation in general. There are remarkable changes in the grace and beauty of both horse and rider as a result of my lunge lessons.

The United States Dressage Federation recommends one lunge lesson/week for every rider at every level - including Olympic-level dressage riders. We as trainers become unbalanced and tense ourselves without attention given to us by an instructor with a horse on the lunge line.

How much progress can I expect to see?

In the first four lessons, a student age seven or over generally learns to post the trot. Within the first ten lessons, an adult or older child generally learns to ride the canter. Every person's progress is different.

There is a great deal of variation among riders in the following: confidence, coordination, ability to follow instructions (I call this having the ear hear it and the body do what the ear hears - personally not an easy thing for me), strength, flexibility, sensitivity, perseverance and the desire to learn in depth or superficially.

I have often heard other instructors talk about *aptitude* for riding. But to me, there is *so much* involved. No one has *all* the qualities of an excellent rider. The very most

important characteristic is the *desire to learn* - especially when things become frustrating or unexpected things happen. (Both of which do occur with astonishing regularity with horses.)

How many lessons will I need?

We are often asked this question, but the answer is really up to the individual. We have had many students take lessons with us for five years or more. On the other hand, countless people buy horses after having taken virtually no lessons at all. It is all a matter of the *quality* of experience you wish to have with horses.

The more lessons you take on the largest number of horses the better prepared you will be to successfully ride a horse of your own. The more lessons you take, the more you will be able to improve any horse you ride.

What will I learn about horse training?

The purpose of horse training is not just to make the horse submit to the will of the rider but to enable him to carry a rider with all of the grace and agility that he - as a young horse - can move on his own. Essentially this means developing the weight-carrying strength of his hind legs and his back.

In training we use circles and turns, halts and lateral (sideways) movement to develop the strength of the rear end of the horse. It is extremely important at the same time to develop the balance, strength and sensitivity of the rider such that he helps rather than hinders the horse's movements.



Do I need riding lessons to just go trail riding?

Sometimes a student will say, "I don't need to learn all this stuff in the arena. I just want to go trail riding." That might make sense in an Iowa pasture where I learned to ride. However, there are few flat, wide places in the Colorado Rocky Mountains. Trails consist of narrow places, sharp switch backs, drop offs, low hanging branches, trees or boulders close to the trail, steep up-and-down

hills, poor footing and difficult rocky creek crossings. It takes skill to negotiate these places - even with an experienced trail horse. It takes quite a LOT of skill to navigate a horse with little or no experience. (Please note that we are not talking about nose-to-tail dude rides, where the rider is simply a passenger. Riding your own horse alone requires much more skill.)

What's so great about horses for kids?

Many parents tell me what an important role horses have played in their children's lives. They give the child self-esteem and focus. Working with horses provides a healthy outlet for kids in today's world.

Generally parents do not appreciate the role of horses until the child enters the turbulent adolescent years. It is often too late at this point to get them *started* with horses. I advise parents to nurture their *young child's* interest. Horses will then provide a stabilizing influence for them when they enter their more difficult years. Do not lose sight of the fact that the skills that a child learns can be applied to other life challenges as well and will stay with the child throughout his/her entire life.

Always reinforce those activities that will make your child feel competent and unique. What can be more confidence-building than to be in control of a large, strong, potentially fast animal? Centaur Rising provides your child with this opportunity in a maximally safe supportive environment.

How much will it cost me?

Budget \$140-180/mo for lessons at first. If the child is really interested, \$250/mo enables him/her to take group lessons twice a week or to attend one horse camp per month in the summer time. We charge \$300-450 to lease a horse and \$450-500/mo to board a horse through CR. Lessees and boarders receive four private lessons/month, group lessons at a nominal fee and free riding.

What equipment do I need?

Any serious equestrian student should invest in the following:

- boots with high tops and heels. Paddock boots are good for the growing child. Do not buy rubber boots. It is impossible to bend at the ankle and to get one's heels down - a critical element for safe riding.
- gloves. Any gloves suitable for driving a car tend also to be good for riding. You need not buy expensive riding gloves. Isotoner-type gloves, inexpensive knit gloves, or thin pliable goatskin/deerskin gardening gloves will suffice.
- riding pants. It is important to wear close-fitting stretchy pants. Jeans chafe at the knees. Breeches may be purchased second-hand or at a reasonable price at local tack stores. I wear leggings.
- A close fitting knit shirt, sweater or vest. It is important that the instructor see the profile of your upper body. Baggy shirts, coats or sweaters short-change you on the full benefit of your lesson
- an approved riding helmet. We require all children to wear ASTM-approved equestrian helmets. Again, check with your local tack shop

Now, put on your stuff and come learn to ride!

Rates for Lessons

As 2/23/06
All rates are per person

one only packag

private, 30-minutes (ages 3-5)	\$40	4 for \$140
private, 45-minutes (age 6)	\$45	4 for \$160
private, 60-minutes (age 7+)	\$50	4 for \$180
two people, 60-minutes (age 8+)	\$35 ea	4 for \$120 ea
3+ people, per person (age 8+)	\$30 ea	8 for \$190 ea



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an interview with
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2/23/06

What is "Centaur Rising"?

Centaur Rising is a non-profit organization that received 501(c)(3) status in 2005. More about Centaur Rising can be found on our website at www.CentaurRising.org.

Dressage is the basis for our horse training. It is the classical form of training that is centuries old. It dates back to ancient Greece. Dressage provides the foundation for all types of riding. Trainers of all disciplines value the contributions of dressage.

Horses help provide a structure for children. It is difficult for anyone to become grounded in this day and age. Horses teach kids so many things. Life is REAL at the riding stable.

What is the best age to start my child in riding lessons?

This depends upon the interest level of the child. Our horses are so gentle that preschoolers can learn to ride without fear. Don't push your child, but if he/she is interested, NOW is the time to begin.

How safe is horseback riding?

Over the last 25 years, an equivalent number of juvenile students have occasionally broken bones that have temporarily kept them from riding. By and large, these accidents *did not* happen at the riding stable and actually had *nothing* to do with horses. They have been accidents on the playground, with bicycles, rough housing with siblings, falls on the ice. Judging from these statistics, I'd say horseback riding through Centaur Rising is safer than most other activities of your child.

It *is* important to take precautions, to learn correctly, to learn from experienced instructors on experienced horses. That's why we're here!

Are programs offered year round?

We offer riding lessons in our indoor arena year-round. The "After School at the Stable" program is offered consistent with the public school calendar. In the summer we offer a variety of horse camps. (See our Horse Camp brochure.) We also offer trail rides in the summertime.

My child wants us to buy her a horse. What do you think?

You should first enroll your child in lessons to see if he/she is really interested. Give it a year. By this time, your child will have ridden a variety of horses and developed

skills. We also recommend leasing a horse before you buy one. This way you can further determine just how dedicated your child is. Buying a horse is a big commitment. It is true that many people simply “get rid of” horses when they tire of them. This is not what we teach at Centaur Rising.

Can my child learn about the responsibilities of horse ownership at Centaur Rising?

“After School at the Stable” touches on this briefly. Basic Horse Camp is the best way to learn about horse care and the work associated with owning a horse.

How does Centaur Rising compare with other places that offer riding lessons?

Few instructors offer school horses. Centaur Rising has a variety of *experienced* school horses. One cannot buy a school horse. We usually own even a well-trained horse at least two years before he is dependable enough to use in our lesson program. The majority of horses do not have the temperament of a school horse.

There is no substitute for the experience of our instructors. Jim has been teaching people to ride for *over thirty years*. Kris has been doing so fulltime since 1992. Both Jim and Kris have been involved in the United States Dressage Federation’s rigorous instructor certification program. Both continue to take riding lessons, train and show horses.

Centaur Rising has a cadre of excellent advanced students who serve as wonderful role models. There is an enthusiasm here that is hard to match in a place where there are few students and little activity.

What do you recommend: private or group lessons?

Private lessons are essential for beginners under the age of eight. The After School at the Stable program has the wonderful advantage of using more advanced peers to help teach beginners – under very close supervision. Our advanced students are *very serious* riders and trainers. They are able to explain things because they have dealt with these problems themselves. Verbalizing helps them to solidify their own understanding. Using peers maintains a level of enthusiasm and a desire to push on to the next level that is tough to duplicate when an adult teaches a child. I have really seen students blossom when they enter our After School program. When students become intermediate to advanced riders, they move on to group and/or private lessons with Kris or Jim.

What does Horse Camp offer my child?

Basic Horse Camp covers a lot of educational material that is not covered in the After School program or in private lessons. The child is involved in the hands-on activities of horse care. Intensive Camp and Little Kids’ Camp enable the child to ride more than once a day. This *really* expedites learning.

Can a pre-schooler benefit from riding lessons?

The main requirement I have for a child to learn is that he/she be able to hold the reins and to be able to follow instructions. Children as young as age three can learn to gently steer, turn and stop the horse. They gain much confidence. If a child has a strong interest in horses, I feel it is very important that they be able to build upon the foundation of riding safe, quiet, obedient horses. Too often I have heard of young children mounted on horses unsafe for them. What a way to extinguish a love of horses!

I tell parents not to expect a lot of progress in three-, four- and five-year olds. Their legs are not very long. They don’t weigh very much. It is difficult to follow complex instructions. Young children should be given the opportunity to ride *if they are interested*. Do not be dismayed if they want to drop out for a while. Interest may come and go at this age.

Five- and six-year-olds will learn to post the trot. Some will progress to the canter. Children must be age eight before they can start lessons in a group. However, six- and seven-year-olds may progress to a group after they have started with private lessons.

Little Kids’ Camp is great for 5-7-year-olds. They get to do more handling and grooming and learn basic horse care.

How do you manage to keep teenagers interested in horses at Centaur Rising?

When I was a teenager, it was my goal to become an “adolescent psychologist”. I majored in psychology all through college and received a Masters degree in Counseling Psychology. Then, I realized I was far too action-oriented to sit still and listen. I pursued further education so that I could do applied research, which I did for 20 years. NOW, I am *back* – somewhat inadvertently - to adolescent psychology.

Basically it comes down to understanding where each person is coming from and what makes each child feel good about him/herself.

I worked 20 years in government and business settings, a lot of time evaluating what made organizations work. I try to give kids a lot of opportunities that will help them later on in life. Teenagers at Centaur Rising teach and supervise younger and less experienced kids. They train horses (with far more expertise and success than most local “horse trainers”). They compete in shows. They help put on shows. Some work in the office, develop educational programs, help guide trail rides and – most importantly – learn to work well with each other.

We’ve always planned to keep our child’s horse at home. Why would we board her horse through Centaur Rising?

It all depends upon what you want for your child. A child can quickly lose interest in her horse if she keeps it at home. A lot of what’s important to kids is the social life at the riding stable. Kids encourage each other to excel with their horses. They keep learning. They go to shows together. They’re a *very positive* constructive influence on each other. I think that’s the biggest thing you’d miss in keeping your horse at home. {Besides, horses are a HUGE responsibility. Do you *really* want a horse to chew up, kick down and poop all over your nice back yard?}

Do you teach English or western?

We teach basic riding. A horse is a horse; whether you wear a cowboy hat, hunt seat cap or a derby. Learn first how a horse works, how your body influences the horse. These things are SO much more important than the type of tack one uses.

We teach dressage, which is really neither English nor western. It is the foundation for all good riding. One can specialize in so many directions after the “great grounding” of dressage.

Do you give riding lessons to adults?

Adults represent about one-third of our students at any one time. We’d like to have more adult students. Riding is an unbeatable stress-reliever for them.

What do you do in the very first lesson?

We cover a lot in the first lesson. To our knowledge, we have never given an introductory lesson to someone who did not learn a

lot, regardless of his or her current level of riding.

Catching the horse and bringing him to the riding arena is a component of most lessons (the exception being when the horse has been used in the previous lesson – or when the student is sufficiently advanced to do this before his/her lesson). We teach basic horse safety, how to approach the horse, how to halter and lead him. We put the horse in cross ties, do some very basic grooming, explain about different types of saddles and bridles, how to select the right saddle for the rider and then how to tack the horse.

We teach the rider how to mount properly, how to adjust the stirrups and the importance of sitting correctly in the saddle. We teach the rider how to follow the horse’s movement with his hands, seat and legs, how to use these three “aids” in rhythm with the horse to influence the horse, to regulate his speed, to turn him in straight lines and circles.

Generally the first lesson is confined to the walk and to the indoor arena. Rare is the rider, regardless of experience, who can walk the horse in a straight line along the wall, turn at one letter and walk straight to the next letter and walk in a round circle of prescribed size. Most riders (even “experienced” ones) simply have never learned how to use their “aids”.

We usually also teach adults a few steps of the leg yield, getting the horse to move sideways from the rhythmical pressure of the rider’s leg.

