

Who is Lee Ziegler?

She was born a horsewoman. As she explains, she was genetically predisposed to it. Lee's mother spent her early childhood on a cattle ranch in Wyoming. Her father was from the horse country of Kentucky. Lee was riding horses by the time she could walk.

A Winding Road

LEE SPENT MANY SUMMERS WITH HER FAMILY AT HER GREAT UNCLE'S WYOMING ranch, where he made sure she always had a horse to ride. In between summers in the West, she was fortunate to learn more formal riding from other instructors, in particular a former US Cavalry instructor. She has fond memories of several horses that taught her along the way. Since her father was in the Air Force, the family moved often, so horses tend to be associated with places in her mind. When she lived in Pennsylvania, Lee rode an ancient lesson babysitting horse at the nearby riding stable. When the family moved to Texas, a pinto named Old Pete came live with them. When they moved to Colorado her great-uncle sent her a horse from Wyoming. He was a small ranch horse named Barney. Along with jumping and working cattle, Barney taught Lee about the singlefoot - foreshadowing what was to come.

When the family was transferred to Europe, Barney went home to Wyoming and Lee took dressage instruction under a German riding master. More foreshadowing.

Once back from Europe, Lee continued to ride stable horses in between semesters at the University of California, Riverside. Riding took a back seat to her studies for a while, but horses were never completely out of her life. After graduation she started graduate school in Colorado,



Lee Ziegler and her Missouri Fox Trotter, Morgan.

but then was severely injured in a car accident. Despite a badly broken pelvis and hip, she was determined to ride again one day. However, soon after her marriage her husband arranged for her to work with an Anglo Arab, and she discovered that training trotting horses was extremely painful.

Lee's father wasn't about to see his daughter give up on what had been her lifelong passion.

He convinced her to try a gaited horse. Riding one turned in to owning many, and training more, as well as becoming a judge for several gaited breeds.

Thirty years and innumerable gaited horses later, gaited horse riders around the world have benefited from Lee's father's suggestion. Lee is now known for her knowledge of gaits and gaited horses and she has shared that knowledge with others by teaching them to ride their gaited horses - in person and through her writing and clinics.

Cinnabar

ONE HORSE IN HER LIFE THAT STOOD out from all the rest was Cinnabar, a Fox Trotter. Lee raised Cinnabar from birth and he lived most of his life with her.

by Donna Campbell Smith

“He slept in my arms as a newborn foal, and continued all of his life to ask me to sit on the ground so he could put his head in my lap when he slept.”

Cinnabar wrapped his neck around her in a horse hug whenever he saw her. Lee got a hug when she turned him out to pasture, and another one on his way back from grazing. “He was a Golden Retriever in a horse body! He loved just about everybody, and would stand for hours to be petted and fussed over by children or older folks.”

Lee says, “Cinnabar taught me a lot about training an intelligent horse, particularly about how to keep things interesting. He was one of those horses that does something once and then understood how to do it for the rest of his life.”

do it again. He was a good trail horse and did well at shows, but he didn’t take after his mama who lived to work cattle. Cinnabar didn’t care much for working cows. Lee said he’d do it if asked, but she thinks he found cows pretty disgusting.

Cinnabar won plenty of ribbons and trophies showing, even when he was up against non-gaited horses.

“He made a great ambassador for his breed, and even participated in a “parade of breeds” at an Olympic festival that was held in Colorado Springs,” Lee says. “We



Lee, Barney, and dog, Penny. In addition to horses, Lee has a life long love of Golden Retrievers.

Gaited horse riders around the world have benefited from Lee’s father’s suggestion.

On the other hand Cinnabar let Lee know that if he had learned something, there had better be a good reason for him to bother to

did a lot of things over the years, covered a lot of miles, and I can still feel the rhythm of his gait in my dreams. I miss him every day, and even though I am riding his nephew now, it is not quite the same.”

Cinnabar sustained a severe injury at age 21 and had to be put down. “(Ending his life) was the hardest decision I ever had to make,” Lee reflects.

Appreciating Smooth

OFTEN ASKED IF gaited horses are really that smooth,

Lee answers, “When I started riding these horses [gaited], I could last about 15 minutes on a trotting horse at that gait before my smashed-up body wanted to quit. With the gaited ones, I found I could ride several hours and still enjoy the ride. As I have gotten older, the old injuries have turned to arthritis, and I probably wouldn’t be able to ride at all, if it weren’t for gaited horse.

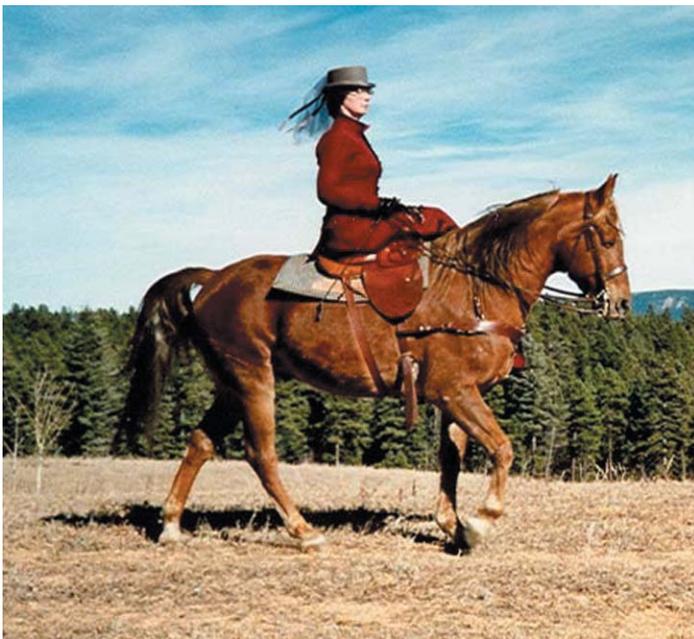
“The gaits of these horses all feel different; there are different types of smooth, some rock you from front to back, some sway you from side to side, and some just happen under you with no feeling of movement in the saddle at all. But, they are ALL much easier on the rider’s body than either posting or sitting a hard trot.

“Gliding along a trail with no concussion on your pelvis or lower back in one of these gaits takes the term “pleasure riding” to a whole new level.

“I do occasionally ride a trotting horse, usually one described as having a comfortable trot, and I find myself subconsciously trying to turn the gait into one of the smoother ones that gaited horses do so easily.”

Showring Perspective

ALTHOUGH SHE RARELY SHOWS THESE days, in the past Lee occasionally



Riding sidesaddle on Cinnabar, on a nice fall day in the Colorado Rockies. Says Lee, “Can you see why I loved this horse?”



It's kind of hard to gait in knee deep snow! Lee riding Balthazar in the wintertime.

showed her young horses to give them exposure to the world, but was not overly concerned with winning. That attitude seemed to work in her favor, as she often placed well, even in open shows against trotting horses. She has never used gimmicks for showing, but believes in staying true to making the best of her horses through good horsemanship. This has made her horses - and those of her students - more fluid and consistent than much of the competition. She believes a judge that is knowledgeable will recognize this and reward it. These days her students carry on the tradition of gimmick-free riding, successfully competing in both gaited and open shows.

Her best moment in the show ring was the time she substituted a fox trot for the trot and placed ahead of the non-gaited horses in an "English riding pattern" in an open show. Lee also enjoys trail classes, especially when the obstacles are tricky and the horse has to concentrate.

Gaited Horse Needs

LEE BELIEVES HORSES ARE HORSES when it comes to training. For

gaited and non-gaited horses there is "riding readiness" when the horse learns to be a willing partner of the rider. Apart from that is the "gait job" part of learning that may take a little more time.

"Often, gaited horses have "special needs" that go beyond what a person would do with a non-gaited one. Their bodies are different, and

they need different exercise programs to develop strength and coordination for their gaits. This is particularly true for those that are expected to canter, and for those that do an unwanted pace or stepping pace," Lee explains.

*"Lee is a phenomenal educator. And one of the best writers I have ever known. No one can teach through writing like Lee. And she still is always learning. You can't shake her from her purpose. **She is dedicated to education.**"*

Liz Graves, Gaited Horse Clinician, Trainer and Author

She adds, "Building strength in the back and hindquarters in horses that have a problem with the pace is a long process, and can't be forced or hurried. I like to use a lot of the time-tested exercises/gymnastics of classical dressage for this, because they are based on systematic development of the horse's body. The one difference may be that I like to leave the horse's head and neck as free as possible during the initial work on these things, to keep the motion of the neck as fluid as possible for some of the gaits."

However, Lee stresses that

gaited horses do not inherently need special bits or riding techniques. Her instruction may surprise some folks who have come up through the old school of gaited horses. She recommends milder snaffle or Pelham bits over the traditional long shank and more severe curb bits often seen used with gaited horses for training. When she shows she uses the mildest bit the rules prescribe.

Asked why long-shanked curb bits are often seen used with gaited horses she explained they are used for control and head set. She also cites "bit inflation" as a reason for the severe bits.

"These horses are generally started in a pretty strong bit... by the time they get to the show ring their mouths are a little (or a lot) numb and the only way the rider can get through to them is with a long-shanked curb of some sort."

Seat is another subject Lee covers in many of her articles and in her clinics. She favors the classical seat as a viable way to ride the

gaited horse; yet, acknowledges that shifting the rider's weight into a less vertical position works better for some horses and for some gaits. Most importantly, Lee explains why and how to use the seat to cue the gaited horse.

Teacher and Student

FELLOW GAITED HORSE TRAINER AND clinician, Liz Graves (See "Full of Joy" Fall, 2004) met Lee many years ago when they were both involved with writing rules and standards for natural gaited Walking Horses. They were both active horsewomen with the same



Lee working with a weanling on ground manners.

goals to educate the public for the welfare of the horse. Liz and Lee hit it off and have collaborated in clinics and judged shows together many times. Liz is one of Lee's biggest fans and doesn't hold back in her enthusiasm for her friend's impact on the gaited horse world.

Lee is very prolific in her desire to teach. She has written many articles, produced two CDs and does clinics all over the country in her efforts to teach people about gaited horses. Her mantra, "Gaits Without Gimmicks" is echoed through all those mediums. In addition, Lee has written a book that will be released in the spring of 2005 by Storey Publishing titled *Easy Gaited Horses*. Lee says, "(It's) basically a 'whole horse' method for riding gaited horses and helping them to work easily in their gaits."

Biomechanics is a science that Lee has studied and applied to her training methods.

"Biomechanics," she explains, "is the study of how living things work in motion. For horses that means what muscles/ligaments and tendons do and how they move the bones to produce movement."

"Someday I hope that some-

one will do the research necessary to figure out which of the easy gaits is the most energy efficient and least physically stressful for a horse."

This is typical of Lee, constantly learning and applying her knowledge to make life better for the horse, and sharing that knowledge with other riders.

Who is Lee Ziegler? According to Lee, "A very fortunate person, who has learned a lot from horses and human teachers in her life, and is very happy to be able to share what they have taught her with others, to make the path a little smoother for their gaited horses."

"I am not a guru, I am just somebody who has been doing this 'gaited horse stuff' a little longer than most, and who went into it with a desire to understand why and how these horses do what they do, and how to help them do it better, without violating any of the long established principles of good horsemanship."

"I was lucky to have the wisdom of my father and the teachings of Ft. Riley (US Cavalry) as a foundation before I ever saw a gaited horse. And, strangely enough, a liberal arts education helped, too. Nothing beats the ability to read, research and think critically when it comes to understanding any subject."

To learn more about Lee Ziegler, her CDs or new book, visit www.leeziegler.com.



Look for *Easy Gaited Horses* in your favorite book or tack store this spring!