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EPISODE NAME: “StressLess” Riding Program for Horseback Riders

Today on Across the Fence we're in the practice ring for a lesson in riding jumping and training with a stress on a StressLess approach to helping riders overcome their fears and improve their mental and physical well-being. Good afternoon and thanks for joining us; I'm Keith Silva in for Judy Simpson.

When it comes to the psychology of sports it's best to consult a wise yogi. I am talking of course about baseball legend Yogi Berra. Who said that baseball is 90% mental the other half is physical. Berra's quip rings true for all sports but it's especially apropos when it comes to competition. Where being able to move past a mistake is the difference between winning and losing. It may not be as easy as hitting a baseball or for that matter falling off a horse but getting to this moment of Zen makes all the difference. Joining me today is Andrea Waldo she's a part-time owner of Triple Combination Farm in North Ferrisburgh. Andrea is a certified trainer with the United States Eventing Association. She's been teaching riding for 15 years and she's a trained psychotherapist. Welcome Andrea.

Andrea.: Thanks.

Keith.: For someone who's never ridden the horse, like me, what's the degree of difficulty and what physical requirements are required?

Andrea.: One of the nice things about riding is that there's really a very broad spectrum of ability so it is open to pretty much almost anybody. At the very beginning you learn how to walk trot and canter and stay in balance with a horse and those basic skills allow you to do a lot of really fun things. You can go on trail rides you can participate in a lot of different activities then that goes all the way up to the Olympic level. So this weekend there's a huge competition in Kentucky where it's the selection trials for the Olympics. You’ve got riders who are jumping 4 foot fences at 570 meters a minute at full gallop. Most people are able to get on a horse and learn the basics and then it gets more difficult from there.

Keith.: Do you need big upper body strength do need strong legs to hold the horse or anything?

Andrea.: Is not so much about strength as it is about balance so it's not about holding on and gripping but learning how to move in balance with a horse. You actually have to be a little bit more yoga then running or weight lifting.

Keith.: What about for the horse? I've seen lots of movies and lots of horses don't like to be ridden at least that's what the movie say. What is it for them jumping and riding is it natural?
Andrea.: The movies are a lot of things that we wouldn't want to do. That whole we're rearing and taking off at a gallop, we avoid that as much as possible. Rearing is actually a really bad thing.

Keith.: Looks good on camera.

Andrea.: It looks great on camera but different horses are suited to different things so some horses love to go out and hang out on the trail and go for casual walks and you have horses like Barbrow and Zenyatta who can go out and run full blast and really love to do that. Jumping horses have to have a lot of bravery and they have to have a lot of courage to do what they do so there so many different disciplines and each horse fits into what they like best.

Keith.: Different horses different people same kind of idea.

Andrea.: Exactly.

Keith.: You develop a program called StressLess riding how did you develop this technique?

Andrea.: StressLess Riding came out of my accommodation are being are riding instructor and a psychotherapist. A lot of my students are either learning as adults or are coming back to riding after a long break. Usually they come with their kids first and then decide I want to get back into this and a lot of them were coming up with a lot of anxieties and fears. What if I fall off, what if I screw up my horse, and they are having a hard time finding a way to cope with that anxiety. So I took some of the ideas that I use as therapy all the time and started to come up with strategies for them in the saddle. A lot of people feel like I shouldn't be nervous and what I've done with StressLess Riding is say instead it's OK to be nervous and it's really normal. You're sitting on a large flight animal who sometimes does some things that are unpredictable so that's understandable that you feel nervous or being able to take those nerves and put them aside so they're not right in your face and getting in your way and be able to do it you do even though you're feeling nervous. My jumping trainer told me everybody is always nervous when their going into a competition situation or when they're getting on a horse; it's normal.

Keith.: Do you get nervous?

Andrea.: Absolutely. Absolutely I feel sick to my stomach every time I go into the start box for cross country.

Keith.: And you've been doing this for over 20 years.

Andrea.: Exactly.

Keith.: So it's a natural part of it and its acknowledging those fears and moving pass that.

Andrea.: Exactly and learning how to recover from when things do go wrong because you can't control every variable so when you have a mistake happen we use the word delete a lot. It just happened it's over delete it and move on.

Keith.: Well Across the Fence recently visited the Triple Combination Farm to see how Andrea puts these theories of StressLess riding into practice.

Good. Okay now just saying a little so you can get their rhythm that works for her. 1234 five perfect Susie. Good. Good. Good. Turn right. Exhale. A little hungry mash is creating their ago. Don't try so
hard, hands loose. You're just trying a little bit too hard. 12345678 keep it boring 123 chest up. Look where you're going. That's good.

Everybody's going to have a less than perfect fence to do next you can stay stuck on that one and have the next three go to hell in a hand basket or you can delete that recover and because you're slowing your mind down everything for her is able to soften. Because in the past when you would've had a little bit of a launcher there he would've run through the rest of the course and would've tensed up. This time because you've been practicing this so much you came through. You had a bit of a long and there and you went regroup.

Yes.

You put back together you put yourself back together and the rest of the courseware beautifully. Okay so it's that sense of delete which just happened that didn't work and keep riding. Ride the horse you have now not the one before you had 2 seconds ago and it went great.

Before we would jump and it will be long and then I'd be crazy for the next jump in this way it's like a no brainer back to something peaceful before the next jump.

Exactly so that was great. Really good.

Keith.: Special thanks to rider Susie Mick from Shelburne and of course her horse Cordy for letting us sit in on the training session. And speaking of sitting in, we're joined by University of Vermont Extension Equine Specialist Betsy Greene. Welcome back.

Betsy.: Thanks.

Keith.: As a teacher do you think any of your students could benefit from some of the StressLess Riding techniques?

Betsy.: Yes it's great because I think they could take some of these from the horse to their final exams delete and move on. Even riding I remember some of the things that she was talking about we had an instructor that said expect what you want or you get what you expect. We had a horse that had vision problems so the end of the arena the open door if you expect ghosts they will be there. If you expect them then the horse will see them too and spook. So the same kinds of things.

Keith.: Do you think that one of the things you talked about was nobody sings when they ride. That's one of the changes we heard Susie singing "boring." That doesn't happen when you're riding.

Betsy.: Most people should probably start singing. Because it will take their mind off of what they're trying to be so nervous about.

Keith.: Right. A lot of what Betsy just talked about Andrea is StressLess Riding synonymous with failing or learning to fail or moving past that.

Andrea.: Definitely moving past it, so much of what this is about is you're going to make mistakes and that happens and you can’t control every element of the situation but you have to keep going and it doesn't have to be perfect to be good. Getting people used to the idea of a mistake happened and now I'm going to move on and practicing that instead of trying to make it perfect every single time that's where ‘delete’
comes in that’s where ‘boring’ comes in. For Susie then she can think ‘this is just boring’ and we're just going along. Then she starts breathing and starts to relax and actually ride.

Keith.: Actually practicing and letting go and not worrying so much.

Andrea.: Getting good at recovering from mistakes as well as not making mistakes because mistakes are inevitable. Nobody's perfect.

Keith.: Betsy you been working with Triple Combination Farm over the last several years. What have you been doing with them?

Betsy.: I actually knew them before they had the current facility.

Andrea.: That's true.

Betsy.: I worked a lot with the Andrea’s partner Mary, talking about the different things to think about as they're looking for places. We had a lot of fun searching. There went to a lot of barns before they finally found one they are in, which is working great for them. We’ve also done some stuff with Chris Armstrong their other partner, who’s the manager aspect of the triple combination. We have done pasture workshops we've done consulting they even put in some footing from our Greener Pastures booklets around the shady areas where there were having some mud issues.

Andrea.: That was a big help.

Keith.: Sacrifices area right.

Betsy.: Or high traffic area.

Keith.: High traffic where you sort of let the animals hang out and you know that's where they're going to hang out and making sure there's good drainage so you don't have mud and things like that. What's it like looking for a barn? It's hard enough to buy a house.

Andrea.: Thank goodness we all have patient people in our lives it was a really challenging process. Thinking about what we really needed and what we really wanted and a farm in getting really clear on that it was a two year process. I wouldn't want to repeat it from really glad we like where we are.

Keith.: I assume it's just like any other piece of real estate. You can look for. There are barns to look for and things like that is there a lot on the market?

Andrea.: No there's not much on the market and a lot of what's on the market needs a lot of work because it's been around for a long time and that's what we're working on right now with our place. Figuring out what needs to be done. We just replaced our indoor ring last year. So there's always stuff to do.

Keith.: Betsy we've talked a lot about businesses Ag. businesses and sometimes we think ‘Oh it's a barn, it’s a farm, that’s not a business’ but it really is, and one of the things you mentioned is the importance of a business plan. Is that something that you worked a lot with and get people to start thinking in that direction?

Betsy.: They actually had to have a very good business plan in place. That's when you first start and find a place you have to to get the funds from the banks, and all that, but a lot of people that have a place
sometimes forget about that and they're not actually looking at what the costs are vs. what they're charging or spending and then turn around and have to figure out how to get by and still care for all the animals or run their programs.

Keith.: Horses are expensive I think that's one thing that most everybody knows. Where are we at with horses right now and the economy. Are we in a good point, a bad point, where are we at?

Betsy.: Things are improving. When people stopped, when the bottom dropped out of everything actually a lot of people started going back to the barn where they may have had the pasture ornament and kept feeding it whether it was at somebody's place of their own. They started actually going back and working with our horses because they weren't going elsewhere and they we're not doing other things. I think we've probably seen some improvement in involvement in horses and return to the love of what they got into or purchased their horse for in the first place.

Keith.: Do most people that have horses at your barn do they come there? Isn't like you go there and you ride the horse for the afternoon or how does work?

Andrea.: Yes it's a very busy community especially after school. Most people are there at minimum three days we see a lot of people are there five and six days a week. They come after work or after school some people come at 6:00 AM because that's what they have time for and they're riding every day. Sometimes they are in the ring sometimes out on the road. We have a really fun active community. People really enjoy being with each other they love riding together and everybody inspires each other to do better so it's a lot of fun.

Keith.: Do you have a full barn? Could you take on more horses more boarders?

Andrea.: I think we have one stall open coming in June but other than that we are full which is a nice position to be in. As Betsy said people are so passionate about their horses and the economy made things a little bit difficult that we're certainly seeing people come back and getting back into their lessons and back into their routines. Show season starts very soon.

Keith.: Is that when everyone's working at is for show season?

Andrea.: We do not have everybody showing at all. Our barn is not exclusively a show barn we have people who have no desire to ever set foot and a ring and then we have people who are competing every couple weekends and excited and passionate about it.

Keith.: Fantastic; thank you very much. If you would like more information about Andrea’s StressLess Riding program or you have a child or grandchild you’d like to learn to ride a horse contact Triple Combination Farm at (802) 877-2121 that's (802) 877-2121 or you can visit their website: triplecombinationfarm.com. I want to thank everybody here at WCAX for making this program possible and as always thank you for stopping by Across the Fence.

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