

Horse Trainer Carol Ley Entertains, Informs Island Riders

By Jessica Delaney

Allison Levy was extremely confused. She picked up a bag of chips, only to receive a sharp "No." The tablecloth, "No." The table, "No." When she picked up the bottle of jam, however, she received a smile and a "Yes."

Relieved, she sat down. "All you need to tell your horse is yes or no," said Carol Ley, a trainer from Walnut Hills Farm. Ms. Ley came to the Island Monday, July 25, to give a series of riding clinics. She was attempting to illustrate the point that simple commands can motivate a horse, and to point out that different personalities can affect the way a horse reacts.

She asked several volunteers to pick up objects and to perform simple tasks with mere yes or no directions. Each person reacted differently. Miss Levy, for example, just smiled, giggled, and tried again. Another volunteer stiffened, a little angry.

"Horses need constant reinforcement," said Ms. Ley. "There are different horse and people personalities. You need to know when to be quiet, when to reinforce."

The rest of the clinic followed in a similar vein, with interaction between the speaker and the 20 guests assembled. Ms. Ley asked questions, demanding answers from those attending, requiring that they both listen and become actively engaged.

Physical activity was also required at the clinic, as Ms. Ley ran riders through a series of exercises to improve balance, center of gravity, and body position. She had riders put their hands under their butts, and then tighten and relax muscles there, giving a tiny taste of how it feels for a horse to have a tense rider. Participants were then asked to

stand up, and position themselves with a strong center of gravity.

Body position, said Ms. Ley, is of critical importance, because horses react instinctively to the rider's position. To illustrate, Ms. Ley explained that she, herself, has a weak right side and that if she doesn't pay attention to position the right side of her body, her horse will respond by short-striding, or not using its full range of body motion.

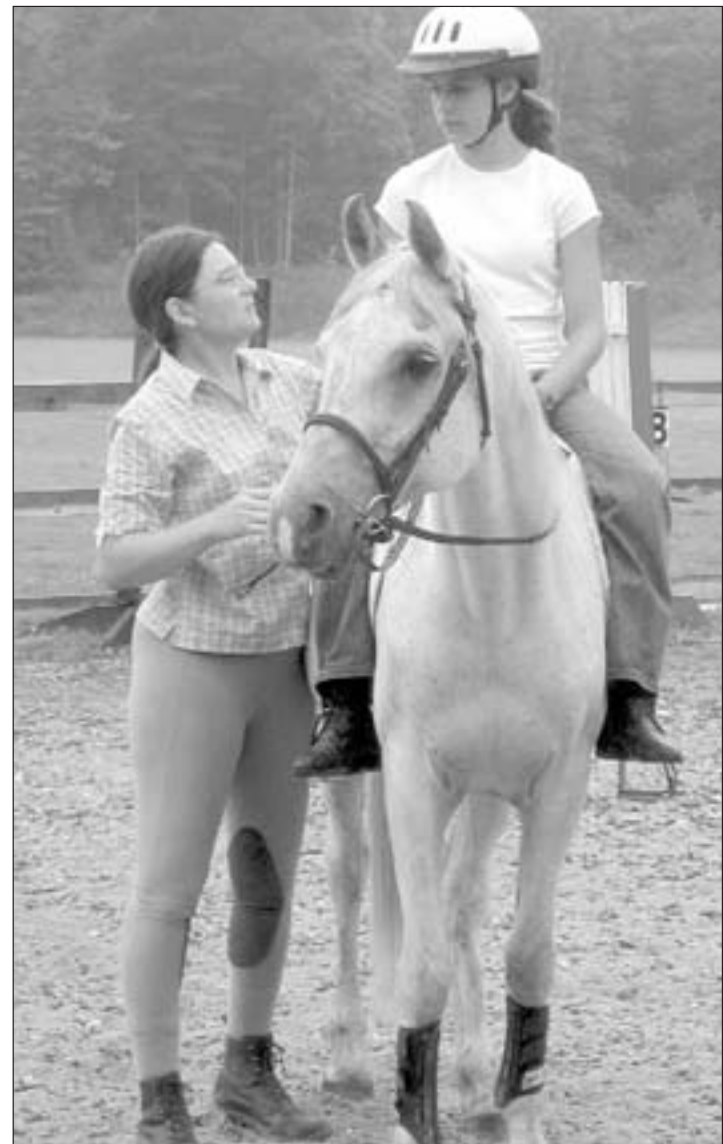
"All of you can affect the way your horse moves by the position of your body," said Ms. Ley. "If you are feeling crummy, your horse is not going to perform the way it is able."

After going person by person and adjusting body posture and working on center of gravity, Ms. Ley moved on to what she considers to be her favorite subject: "Saddles," she said.

"Check them. Check the fit for you and check the fit for your horse. A pinchy saddle is the worst thing you can do to a horse. Get the best saddle you can for the money you have. If you have \$1.98, you find the best saddle you can, and it needs to fit you and the horse."

Although a horse may be full grown, as its training levels increase, back levels can also change, which affects the fit of a saddle. For young people, especially, she said, it is important to check the saddle, as their own bodies grow and develop.

Ms. Ley also challenged several misconceptions about saddle size. She said that the size of the saddle is not dependent upon the size of a person's butt, or even necessarily upon a person's height. Everything has to do with



Trainer Carol Ley worked with small groups during her clinic Tuesday, July 26. Here, she helps rider Gabby Salerno with her posture and foot alignment.

the femur, she said, adding that a short person with a long thigh-bone could comfortably ride in the same saddle as a taller person with a more proportionate leg length.

Fitting a saddle to the horse is important as well, and she gave those attending the lecture several hints on how to check for a good-fitting saddle.

"You need to be able to put your hands under the shoulders, and the saddle needs to clear the withers by three fingers," said Ms. Ley. She also added that the saddle's panels need to be wide and flat, and that three to four fingers should fit in the gullet.

Following her lecture, Ms. Ley asked for questions, and was greeted with silence.

"Well," she said. "I've either dazzled you or baffled you. Or both."

Apparently she dazzled those attending as she was bombarded by questions and comments after closing the program for the evening. But Ms. Ley's work wasn't finished on the Island, as Tuesday, July 26, she also gave riding clinics for youth and adults. From 8 a.m. until noon she performed a clinic for young riders, while the adult clinic, took place from 1 p.m. until 5 p.m. During Tuesday's clinics riders had the opportunity to actually work with horses and the trainer and receive more personal instructions and advice.

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