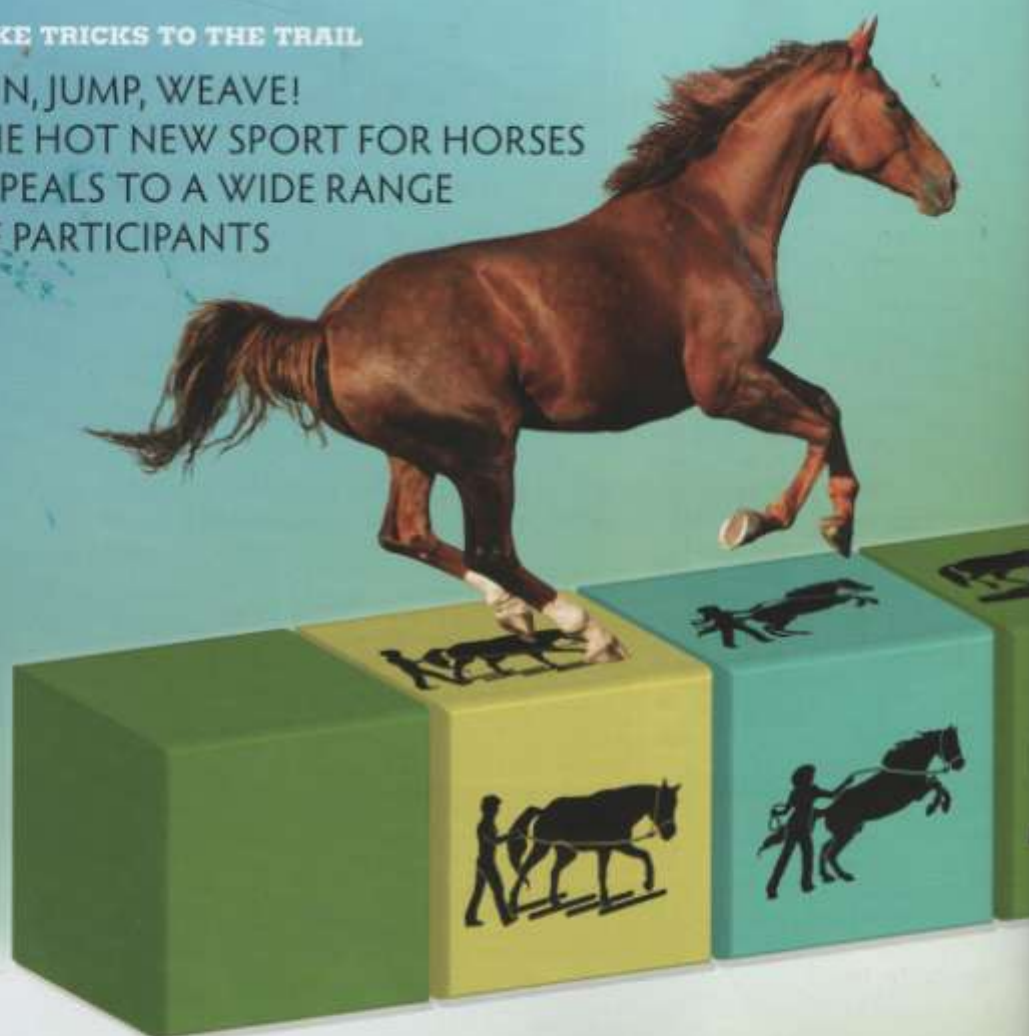


TAKE TRICKS TO THE TRAIL

RUN, JUMP, WEAVE!
THE HOT NEW SPORT FOR HORSES
APPEALS TO A WIDE RANGE
OF PARTICIPANTS



Equine Agility™ is one of the fastest growing horse sports in the world. It's very much like dog agility, only with horses. It is a non-mounted competitive sport in which a horse and handler work through an obstacle course in-hand for ranked placements.

The rapid growth of Equine Agility is happening because it's fun and appeals to three of the fastest growing demographic groups in the horse world today:

- Non-riders who want to compete with their companion horses;
- Youth who love the potential of adding speed to a non-mounted competition; and
- Horse lovers who wish to compete with rescue horses, retired horses or young horses not yet under saddle.

For trail riders, Equine Agility training can give their mounts skills and confidence that translates directly to dependability and predictability on the trail. Here's how it works...

THERE'S A NEW GAME IN TOWN

EQUINE AGILITY™

STORY BY SUE DE LAURENTIS
PHOTOS BY KATE AUSTIN



Every trail riding family has friends who have horses but don't trail ride yet love horse activities. Equine Agility gives them a fun way to spend time with horses and meet new horse friends. Although Agility is a competitive sport, it's designed to be friendly, fun and inclusive and less rigid than many traditional mounted trail classes. This is a sport that will send you home every time with a smile.

Horses as young as weanlings are welcome in Equine Agility classes. Retired horses, rescue horses and even horses in rehabilitation can participate. Agility training helps build confidence, understanding and new skills. Agility training can put fun back into learning for horses that have lost interest in their regular "jobs."

Equine Agility emphasizes the relationship between horse and handler, confidence of the horse, willingness, obedience and agility of body and mind. Horses of all breeds, colors, size, ages and abilities can compete; training or performance under saddle isn't necessary. For all horse lovers, Agility promotes good horsemanship and greater understanding of the versatility and scope of higher education horses are capable of. This is a sport that can break the barriers of preconceived notions about horse training. **Horse lovers who don't ride can succeed and excel in Equine Agility.**



Weave poles require the horse to follow the handler's body and be responsible for her own body position as well. This mare seems fully engaged in the partnership.

THE DIVISIONS AND COURSES

Equine Agility divisions include: **basic in-hand, youth, master in-hand, freestyle in-hand**, and the highest level is **liberty** classes.

The basic in-hand course consists of between eight and 12 obstacles with assigned moves to each obstacle. Course design is customized for each event and the course layout and moves are posted at

continued next page

Perhaps the most valuable skill for Equine Agility or any mounted discipline is the concept of "move forward."

Kristi and Elle demonstrate correct position for the horse in relation to the handler for all speeds. Kristi's upper body aligns between the mare's head and shoulder line. Note that the line is slack and Elle's left ear is cocked in apparent concentration to respond to cues.

Kristi is beginning to ask Elle to move out and away from her while maintaining a constant speed. As her training progresses, Elle learns to move away, circle either to the right or circle to the left as directed.

The mare's focus and obedience are apparent as Kristi asks Elle for an extended trot.

Elle heads into the corner to make a right-handed circle as Kristi directs her.

This left-handed circle includes passing an obstacle before continuing on the straight edge of the arena.

As Kristi halts, Elle's ear and attention are focused on her, and even though her front legs have just completed a step, her haunches are starting to engage in preparation to halt, following the handler's cues perfectly.



How is Equine Agility different from traditional in-hand or non-mounted trail classes?

- Generally, trail classes are judged with a predetermined course, speeds and precision with no variation of moves. Agility moves range from the simple to complex, utilizing obstacles such as weave poles, jumps and pedestals, yet the possible moves per object are many.
- Traditional in-hand trail classes are methodical in tempo. Agility can range from slow to fast and exciting, as the competitor chooses the speed.
- Contact with the horse for guidance is not allowed in trail classes but in Agility contact with an acceptable handling tool such as a guider whip is allowed.
- Trail classes in-hand require formal grooming and show attire while Agility allows casual (clean) equine and human turnout.
- Most in-hand classes offer only one entry per class. Agility is a value as each participant typically gets three runs per day.



Pedestal training helps to instill confidence and teaches a horse to think about what each foot is doing.

sign-in for every event. Multiple moves per object means that many variations are possible, which keeps the courses exciting and fresh. A typical event will give each competitor three runs with a course change each time—a really great value and day of fun for one entry fee.

Objects or obstacles in the basic division can include weave poles, ground ladders, labyrinths, jumps, pedestals, "walk the plank" pedestals, two-tier pedestals, bridges, teeter totters, water obstacles, cavalletti and more. Many separate moves can be assigned to each obstacle. For instance a 36 x 36 inch pedestal can be mounted with the front feet only, all four feet, front feet mounted with a turn on the forehand and turn on the haunches. The almost unlimited variations keep the competitions fun, interest-