



Lady "C" learning about the bridge/teeter totter combination.

ing and fair, as there is never a duplication of patterns. Construction specifications and instructions for obstacles are available on [www.EquineAgility.com](http://www.EquineAgility.com).

### TIME AND COMPLETION

Like dog agility, Equine Agility is based on proper completion of obstacles and time, which means that judging is not subjective or complicated. Some competitors like to sprint through the course yet there are many opportunities to gain a winning edge that don't depend on the speed of the handler. For instance, if the human team member sets the pace at a walk rather than run the course, the team *could still have the winning time* based on proper completion of the obstacles.

### TRAINING FOR EQUINE AGILITY

Foundational training for Agility gives horses the necessary building blocks of education to help prepare them for their future as a saddle and trail horse. Agility training is simply the expansion of ground skills to include object and obstacle training. We also use sensitization (not the same as desensitization) and pattern work combined with directional forward movement. All of these elements contribute to the learning capacity, athleticism and self-carriage of the horse while forging a strong working bond between horse and handler and can result in a communication pattern that may seem almost telepathic.

We encourage a set of 12 basic ground skills that include moving forward, stepping back, halting, yielding the front end or shoulders, yielding the hind end, the two-track, side pass and learning the gaits and transitions on a working length line of 15 to 22 feet.

Horses make strong associations between objects and actions, which facilitates and expedites learning and also makes it fun. Because of the many variations of moves for each object, horses seldom get bored with obstacle training.

Pedestal training is a perfect building block to help horses gain confidence, gymnastic skills and willing-

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### RESOURCES

To begin training your horse in some basic Agility moves, review our "Tricks to Trail" series beginning in September 2008, especially these back issues of Trail Blazer magazine:

- ▶ "Put your Horse on a Pedestal" February 2009, September 2009
- ▶ "Treats as a Training Tool" November/December 2009
- ▶ "Liberty Training I & II" January & February 2010
- ▶ "How Does Your Horse Learn?" September 2011
- ▶ "Shaping Behaviors" May 2011



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ness. Pedestals help a horse think about what each foot is doing, and to focus on the handler. The use of objects in training helps a horse to learn and understand concepts and words. A horse that willingly and obediently responds to requests on the ground such as Step, Up, Down, Around, Back, Over, No and Try Again can also learn to understand praise words such as Good and Cookie Time.

It's remarkable to consider how many times these word cues have helped my trail and trick horses understand what I was asking while riding in challenging terrain and get us both out of some tricky situations.

Perhaps the most valuable skill for Equine Agility or any mounted discipline is the concept of "move forward." A horse should move forward at any speed requested, over or through any obstacle and pattern while maintaining the speed and momentum that the handler requests. On a working length line a horse learns to be responsible for his body position and think independently, which promotes self-carriage. A horse that will obediently move forward and is easily directed is a horse that will seldom have common behavioral issues such as (non) trailer loading.

While some training programs concentrate on teaching



**TOP:** On the Agility course, the horse should be responsive and confident enough to move forward through the obstacles with the slightest direction of the handler. Teddy is easily guided through the ground ladder by his handler, Kristi. **ABOVE:** Teddy clears the jump obstacle cleanly and willingly.



Being able to send a horse through obstacles is a great skill for both trail riding and Agility as Lady "C" demonstrates as Kristi sends her through the cavaletti.

a horse to halt, we use forward movement as the basis for promoting cooperation and enthusiasm. Horses need to move as it is an inherent need and can be used as a powerful motivator and reward. A horse that has learned to move forward briskly and maintain his rate of speed is generally most cooperative when asked either for a halt or to step up on a pedestal. See photo series on p.42 and the digital download videos on training segments at [www.EquineAgility.com](http://www.EquineAgility.com)

### HOW EQUINE AGILITY™ BENEFITS THE HORSE INDUSTRY

Equine Agility™ partners with local, regional and national affiliates to host successful turnkey competitive events. EA contributes structure and support including event planning and rules, online registration, obstacle construction plans, Agility course design and marketing strategies. Equine Agility also hosts and coordinates training clinics, video mentoring, interactive e-forums and social network tie-ins. Equine Agility™ serves as a supporting organization for equine businesses including breed associations to produce excellence in event coordination and also produce revenue for either non-profit or profitable organizations.

### HOSTING AN EVENT IS EASY

All that's needed is an arena, field or round pen (60 feet in diameter), 6 to 8 obstacles, 4 to 6 volunteers for course setup and timekeeping, and then invite your horse friends to participate.

For more information on Equine Agility competitions and events in your area, contact Equine Agility at [EquineAgility@gmail.com](mailto:EquineAgility@gmail.com) or visit [www.EquineAgility.com](http://www.EquineAgility.com)

Equine agility is the perfect activity for horse lovers seeking an enriched experience with their companion horses in a venue that offers and appreciates good sportsmanship and good horsemanship!



Sue De Laurentis and Allen Pogue live in Dripping Springs, Texas, where they own and operate Imagine a Horse and Red Horse Ranch. They blend modern and classical horsemanship to make Trick Horse Training understandable and fun for horse and human. Visit online at [www.imagineahorse.com](http://www.imagineahorse.com) and [www.redhorseranch.net](http://www.redhorseranch.net)



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