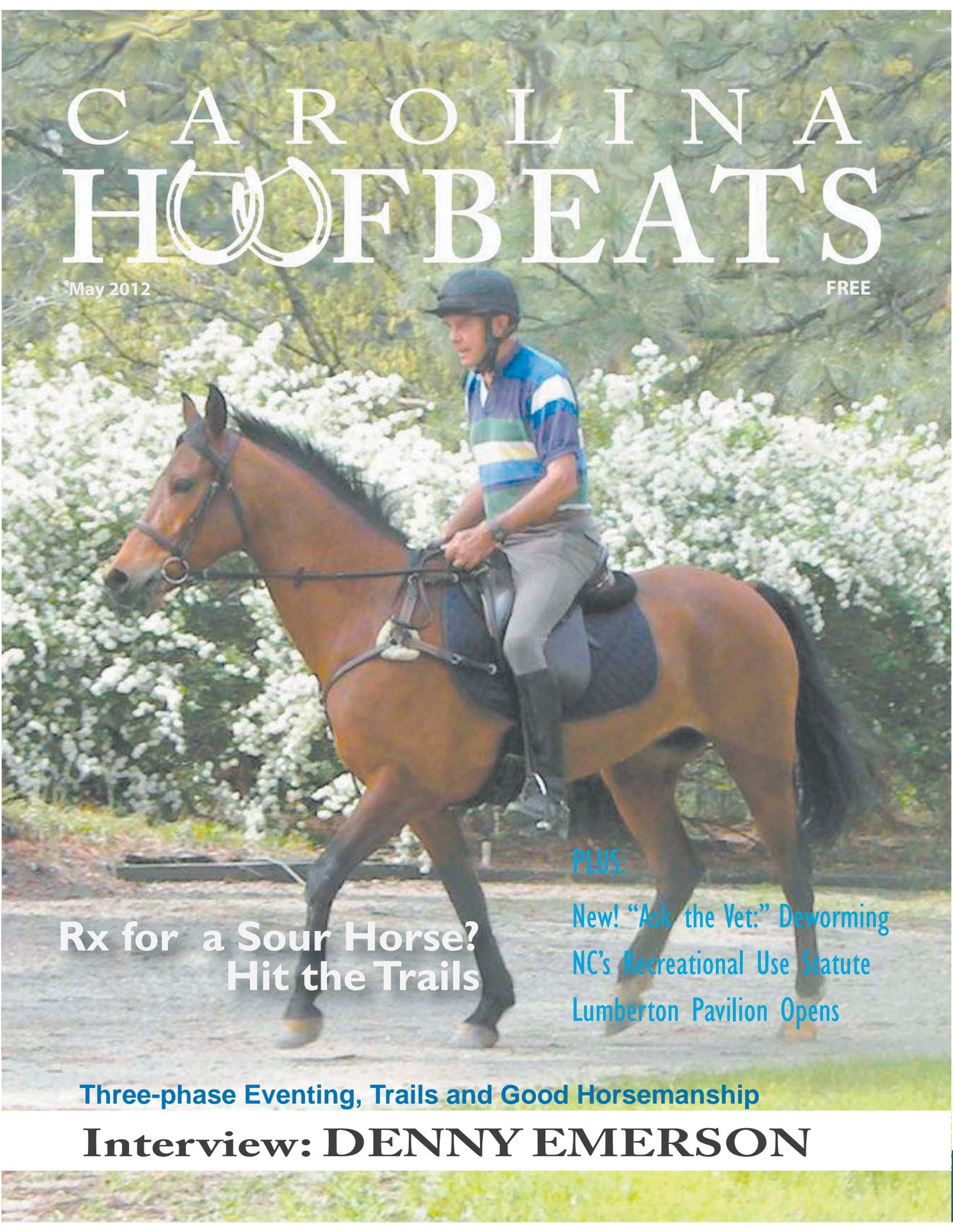


CAROLINA HOOFBEATS

May 2012

FREE

A photograph of a rider on a brown horse, wearing a helmet and a striped shirt, riding through a wooded area with white blossoms. The horse is in motion, and the rider is looking forward.

**Rx for a Sour Horse?
Hit the Trails**

PLUS:

**New! "Ask the Vet:" Deworming
NC's Recreational Use Statute
Lumberton Pavilion Opens**

Three-phase Eventing, Trails and Good Horsemanship

Interview: DENNY EMERSON

Pursuing His Passion

Denny Emerson discusses eventing, trails, and the nature of real horsemanship

In 1956, 15-year-old Denny Emerson completed his first 100-mile endurance ride, the Green Mountain Horse Association 100-mile ride in Vermont. By the time he was 20, he'd logged thousands of miles in endurance rides in his native New England, but he'd never done any jumping.

Then he watched the 1961 Wofford Cup Three-Day Event, the U.S. Olympic Equestrian Team's selection trial for three-day eventing, held that year in Massachusetts. Denny decided he wanted to learn to jump.

Later that same year, he entered his first three-phase event at the Preliminary level—just two grades below the Advanced-level riders he'd watched competing in the Wofford Cup.

He's had a lot of excitement and met a lot of challenges in the 50 years since his first event.

In 1972, he was the U.S. Combined Training Association (USCTA) Rider of the Year. In 1974, he was on the gold-medal-winning team at the U.S. World Championships and in 1976 he was named to the U.S. Olympic team.

He won the U.S. National Championship in 1979, when his horse York was named Horse of the Year. He served for five years as president of the USCTA (now called the US Eventing Association, or USEA), was inducted into the USEA Hall of Fame in 2006, and received the USEA Wofford Cup for lifetime service to the sport.

His equine partners have also become legendary in the eventing world: Core Buff, Victor Dakin, Chestry Oak, York, Epic Win, to name just a few.

In 2000, the *Chronicle of the Horse* named Denny Emerson one of the 50 most influential horsemen of the 20th century. And his recently published book, *How Good Riders Get GOOD*, is a must-read for anyone who wants to understand how horsemen and women can achieve success. Thousands of people follow his very popular Facebook pages.

These are notable accomplishments in a highly demanding sport. Denny has earned

his place in the history books—not only for these accomplishments, but also for his mentorship of thousands of younger riders, many of whom have gone on to become national and international champions, and for his avid promotion of good teaching, top-notch breeding, and improved safety in eventing, his greatest passion.

Eventing: The Ultimate Challenge

Also called combined training, three-phase, or horse trials, eventing is an equestrian triathlon of dressage, endurance (cross country jumping), and stadium jumping (show jumping), with deep roots in the cavalry.

Created in Europe and called “the mili-

tary” when it was first included in the 1912 Stockholm Olympics, the *concours complet d'equitation* (complete equestrian competition) was embraced by many cavalries as a tool to train and test their finest mounted units. It evolved into a civilian sport after World War II, when the cavalries became mechanized.

Today, the governing organization (USEA) recognizes six levels of competition, with the lowest level (Beginner Novice) designed to encourage all riders who have at least a basic proficiency in dressage, jumping, and horsemanship skills.

Getting Started

How can more people, especially young riders, be introduced to eventing? Denny addressed this issue recently, after a low-level event that he and his wife May hosted at their Tamarack Hill Farm winter location, in Southern Pines.

“Riders have to find out about eventing,” he explained. “Horse sports are regional. Some areas are hotbeds of eventing, some places have a lot of hunters or barrel racers or trail riders. Kids learn from what they see around them. One or two influential trainers can make a big difference in what the young riders are drawn into.

“It's also a matter of awareness,” he added. “What do the national media cover? Racing, rodeo, show jumping? That's what captures your attention.”

“Also,” he continued, “we've had major changes in our population and not as many people can keep their horses at home. By 2050, there will be 450 million Americans, and that means less open land. Endurance races, trail riding, foxhunting, eventing—these sports all require large tracts of land.

“And eventing can be expensive,” Denny admitted. “It's a very labor-intensive horse sport. It requires tons of prep work on the trails and jumps, three different venues for competition – a dressage arena, land and jumps for cross country, another arena for stadium jumping – and dozens of dedicated volunteers to build and run everything. A full-scale competition requires timers, scorers, jump judges, ring crew, dressage judges, scribes and safety personnel, along with the usual show coordinators, parking assistants, show manager and stewards, stabling, office workers, veterinary and farrier support.

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tight-knit community. To make it work, everyone needs to pitch in. If you're not competing, you volunteer. In the early days of the sport, you sometimes competed and volunteered at the same event. Otherwise, it just wasn't going to happen."

Denny would love to see eventing go back to its roots, and also become more affordable again. He believes the sport is being priced beyond what many aspiring riders can afford. From the competitor's point of view, a recognized event means paying for entries, stabling, mandatory drug fees, USEA membership costs (or non-member fees), plus transportation, meals and lodging. All for the chance to win just one ribbon for the whole weekend!

Denny noted, "People who sit on the boards for many of the governing organizations and

More About Eventing

Check out these resources for information about eventing:

- NCDCTA.org (North Carolina Dressage & Eventing Association)
- USEventing.com (USEA)
- Discovereventing.com

Cross-country Jumping

Dressage and basic jumping skills can be learned in an arena, but to understand cross-country, you'll have to get out of the arena and onto a well-built course with a good coach.

Get comfortable with trail riding, then learn how to manage terrain at a trot, canter and gallop. Learn how to safely jump up and down small banks, over ditches and logs. Seek out the places that hold lower-level competitions and will let you school over their courses.

Where can you school over cross-country jumps? The farms below all require advance notice, a fee, a current Coggins and a waiver. Some offer schooling only on certain days, some specialize in "starter" jumps, and some require you to have a buddy or ground person. Contact them for details.

Five County Stables, Zebulon

www.fivecountystables.com

The Fork, Norwood

www.forkstables.com

Rougemont Sport Horses, Bahama

www.rougemontsporthorses.com

Thoroughbred Training Ctr, Mocksville

www.ttcmocksville.com

Carolina Horse Park, Raeford

www.carolinahorsepark.com

Glenbaer Farm, Carthage

www.glenbaer.com

Foothills Equestrian Ctr (FENCE), Tryon

www.fence.org

Half Halt Farm, Cherryville

www.halfhaltfarms.com

Fenridge Farm, Mebane

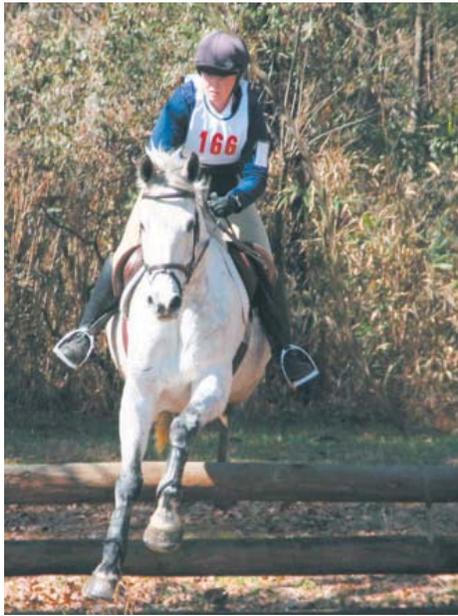
www.fenridgefarm.com

Equiventure, Rougemont

www.equiventurefarm.com

The Ark, Monroe

www.wnaaa.com



committees, the people who make the rules, may have forgotten how hard it is for an average wage-earner to find the money to compete. We need to make it more inviting."

"Event organizers often lose money on recognized events," he added, "so they may hold two or three unrecognized events to be able to afford to put on just one recognized event."

At a local, unrecognized event, riders are expected to abide by the USEA rules, but there's generally no drug testing or membership fees involved. The cross-country course isn't as decorative, stabling and grounds fees aren't imposed, and the atmosphere is low-key.

"But," Denny added, "we have to have those big recognized events because that's where we test our advanced riders and select our international teams."

Changing Times

Rider and trainer attitudes have changed, Denny explained. "There's more of a vendor-customer relationship between trainers and riders now. Riders who can afford to spend money on the best horses, the best training, competitions—they want to see results on their score sheets, ribbons on their walls."

Eventing emphasizes the partnership between horse and rider. "Event riders must be real horsemen," Denny insisted. "You must know all about your horse—nutrition, hoofcare, fitness, conditioning, skills and requirements for three different disciplines, everything. You need to spend hours in the saddle, hours in the barn, hours of observing and learning and understanding. It's not just a hobby, it's your life."

Years ago, Denny noted, Pony Clubs were the incubators that produced many future eventers.

"Pony Club used to be more oriented toward eventing, but not so much these days.

People are more distant from their horses now, and true horsemanship has become supplanted by merely learning to ride.

"People live in the city or suburbs and drive out to the country once or twice a week to ride inside an arena, at a stable where their horses are cared for by someone else.

"Young riders don't have the opportunity to be 'barn rats,' and I use that term with great affection," he continued. "A barn rat is a youngster who shows up every day after school and hangs around the barn all weekend, learning and absorbing everything and asking a thousand questions until someone gives her a job mucking stalls or grooming or cleaning tack. And that's how you learn.

"Today, the best opportunity for aspiring barn rats is probably at a horse-immersion summer camp."

Back to the Trails

In its emphasis on whole-horse conditioning and whole-horsemanship knowledge, eventing is akin to endurance racing, which has taken Denny right back to his roots.

He's compiled nearly 3,000 miles in American Endurance Ride Conference (AERC) races. In 2004, at age 62, Denny earned a Tevis Cup buckle by completing the Western States Trail Ride within 24 hours on his Arabian TR Rett Butler.

He's therefore the only rider in the world who has won both a gold medal in international eventing and a Tevis Cup buckle in endurance trail. Now 70, Denny and his wife May currently divide their time between Southern Pines, N.C., and his longtime home in Strafford, Vermont, where Denny is currently conditioning his trail horses for the summer and early-autumn endurance rides.

Endurance races, trail rides, eventing—it's all part of the same experience. For Denny, the hours spent in the saddle translate into days and months and years building the partnerships, human to equine. There's no place he'd rather be.

✉ Sarah Blanchard

Carolina Hoofbeats Editor Sarah Blanchard is an instructor, trainer, equine marketing professional and author for more than 40 years. She evented for several years in New England, qualifying for the Area I Training Level Championships in 1987. She manages Pegasus Marketing and Communications, specializing in writing, editing and business promotions for the equine industry. She is also an NC open show judge.

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