



FRANKLIN RIDING ACADEMY: Try Your Hand At Saddle Seat

STORY AND PHOTOS BY REBECCA BAUER

David Landrum wants people to know the joy of horses, and he has a passion for what the horse means to our community.

"The horse has always been important to Williamson County," says David, who has been training American Saddlebred and Saddle Seat horses for more than 30 years. Recently, he has shifted his focus towards riding lessons, and with his wife Karla, they opened up Franklin Riding Academy last fall.

Their operation sits just off Murfreesboro Road on the east side of Franklin, where the large barn fronted by white fencing and a white gazebo awards drivers a pretty view every time they pass by. The barn's

architecture was modeled after the historic barn at Maryland Farms in Brentwood where American Saddlebreds and Tennessee Walkers also once flattered the grounds.

David has worked primarily with registered American Saddlebreds, Pleasure Tennessee Walking Horses and Morgans, and now these same breeds are part of their lesson program. It's a great opportunity for adults and children, whether experienced or just beginning, to ride on well-trained lesson horses.

"Every day I would have someone calling and asking where they could take lessons," Karla says. "There's really a need here. We're not in competition with anyone because we teach a different style of riding, we don't do jumping."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

"This is a gated lesson program," adds David. "There's been a void in this discipline, there's no saddle seat program in the area."

The gaited breeds are known for three or five gaits: the common walk, trot and canter, then slow gait and rack. Brittany Harris is the head instructor who teaches this style of English riding called Saddle Seat, demonstrated by the rider's classic position and the horse's natural, high-stepping gaits. Like many disciplines of riding, this style is historically rooted in America's earlier agricultural days. Saddlebreds were ridden for their stamina and smooth ride as they carried their riders across plantations. They were also common military mounts, which included General Robert E. Lee's favorite horse, Traveller.

"We love all breeds, but we were especially attracted to the Saddlebred," Karla explains. "Our daughter grew up riding them and competing; she loved the breed and the patterns in competition." Their daughter Lindsey won over a dozen Grand Championship titles in both American Saddlebred and Tennessee Walking Horse shows.

Riders are encouraged to come out before their lesson to spend time in the barn and groom their horse before they get on for a private, 30-minute lesson.

"We can take a rider from beginner to advanced level," David says.



Left to right: Karla, David, Shark the horse, Larry Taylor (Farm Manager), Brittany Harris (head instructor)

"We have the horses capable of teaching them; they have a lot of talent."

This summer they will offer a children's camp and, "Each week is a little different, so if a child attends more than one week, it won't be the same; they'll get to experience something a little different," Karla says. They also feature a monthly "Lady's Night Out," when women (and men are welcome, too) come out to ride, then gather in the lounge for wine and cheese or dessert.

Of course, the greatest assets to the program are the horses. They include Shark, a gelding that displays the quality, handsome looks and disposition of a well-bred Morgan.

"He's patient and great for all levels of riders," says David. "Though, he's known as a prankster, always getting into something." Nothing a peppermint treat apparently won't fix.

Bubbles is considered a diva, but is also a fine example of the Saddlebred breed. When she's turned out, watching her trot around the paddock is like watching the finesse of an Olympic figure skater. And then there's Pappa, who is 24 and owned by a six year-old girl who can take the reins as confidently as any adult rider.

"Our job is to keep them properly conditioned and to be the best lesson horses," David explains. Their farm manager, Larry Taylor, also keeps the place immaculate.

"He's why it looks so good," David says. "We want it to be first class." The barn cats obviously have it good here, too.

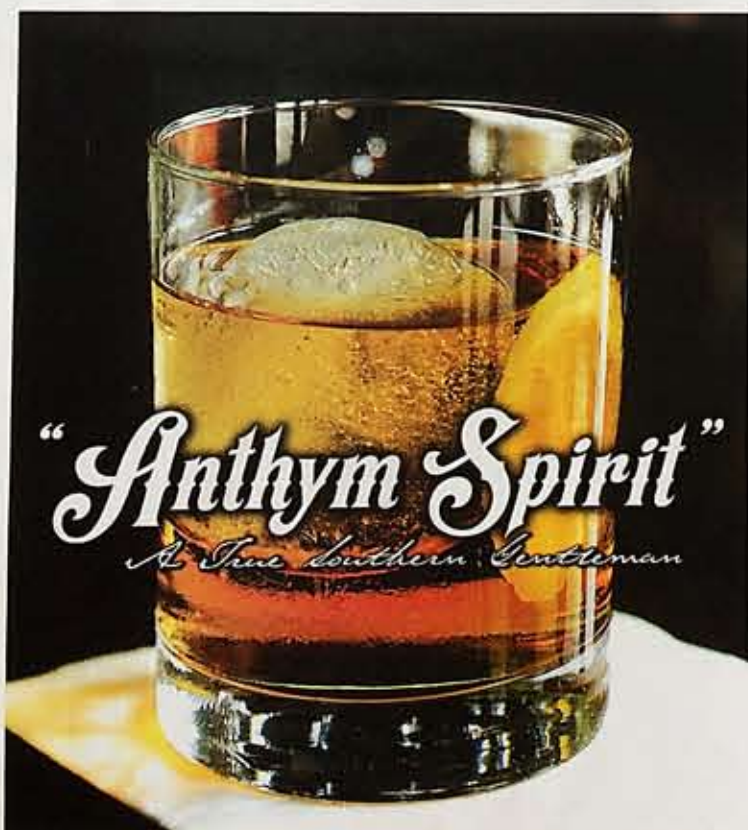
I had the chance to ride Shark and discovered just how nice of a horse he is; he knows his job well and would be a joy for anyone to ride. As for saddle seat riding, it offers a good work out, too - especially for the legs.

Horses have been an indelible part of our county's history for the past 200 years. David is on the board of Friends of Franklin Parks and Williamson County Fair and is hopeful of seeing more opportunities for everyone to enjoy horses.

"I would love to see horses have a bigger presence at Harlinsdale, it's like the northern gateway to Franklin," he says. "We want to be here for the community, we enjoy it, and enjoy seeing others light up when they're around the horses. Karla even lights up just talking about them."

Find out more at FranklinRidingAcademy.com.

Rebecca Bauer is a Maryland Native and has called Franklin home for the past 12 years. She is a marketing communications specialist, freelance writer and equestrian who loves discovering the people and places of the south.



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