



Finding Balance in Horse Ownership

The USHJA Owners Task Force members continue their 'Taking Ownership' series with a look at what it means to own a horse.



By Megan Lacy

Over the past several issues of *USHJA In Stride* magazine, we've talked about different aspects of horse ownership—from choosing the right trainer to the process of buying a horse. These are important, foundational steps in the ownership process; but for a moment, let's dig deeper and think about what it means to own a horse.

As it turns out, owning a horse represents something a bit different to everyone you ask. Words such as "responsibility," "passion" and "commitment" come to mind for most. But the constant is that owning a horse enriches your life, and the level to which you make yourself a part of the care and training of your horse is up to you.

Some people choose to make their horses a way of life, caring for them at home and acting as the primary rider. On the opposite end of the spectrum, owners may opt for a full board and training operation where they simply enjoy watching the horse compete. There are, of course, many options in between where owners may or may not ride their horses. And there are many factors driving owners' choices; what's important for each owner is making a conscious choice about the day-to-day involvement.

"One of my favorite things is just to turn them out and watch them roll or play. Just being connected to them is so much of what I love about this sport," said Didi Mackenzie, a longtime successful Amateur-

Didi and Kenny Mackenzie with MTM Inside Scoop

Owner from Flower Mound, Texas. Mackenzie keeps her horses at home, does all of her own care and training there, and meets her trainers at the horse shows.

Mackenzie grew up with the "horse bug" and started riding when she was around 5 years old. She knew early on that she wanted horses in her life for the long haul. Through various twists and turns with top professionals such as Jerome Robertson, Mike McCormick, Colleen McQuay and those at the Hugh Frank Smith Pony Farm by her side, Mackenzie has remained involved and shown at the top of the sport. She competed

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most recently in the Platinum Performance/USHJA Green Hunter Incentive Championships (*see p. 20*).

Mackenzie and her husband, Kenny, own and operate Quail Hollow Tack, which is based out of Flower Mound but which travels to horse shows across the country. They've built their lives around the horses they own. While Mackenzie participates in every aspect of her horses' training and care, she notes that her approach is not for everyone.

"We all do it because we love the horses," she said. "I've been crazy about horses and animals in general since I was a kid, and I wouldn't change anything about my life with them. Some people give up a

lot for their kids, and I truly admire that. My kids are my horses and dogs, so they come first for me. What you do with your horses comes down to life choices, but no matter what works for you, I believe spending as much time as you can with your horses will make your life better."

No. 1 Advocate

USHJA Owners Task Force Chair Debbie Bass, of Gates Mills, Ohio, is also an owner of several top Hunters. She keeps her horses in a full board and training program with Christopher Payne and Dave Belford at New Hope Farm. While Payne rides many of her horses, Bass also competes in the Amateur-Owner section, a fairly common sce-

“There’s always something to be done around the barn; just jump in and get involved.—Daisy Farish”

nario within our sport.

"My trainers have so much knowledge, and I took great care in choosing the team—trainer, vet and farrier—that are all part of my horses' success and health. It's a team effort, and my role as an owner is to be informed and responsible for my horses' welfare.

"I'm constantly educating myself," Bass continued. "I've been really lucky to be surrounded with great people. When you're not caring for your horses at home and are instead entrusting them to a professional, you have to listen

with discernment. You can't give your power away and stop asking questions. You are still your horse's No. 1 advocate."

Daisy Farish, 16, whose accomplishments in the show ring are already remarkable for her young age, does much of her own care and training with her horses. They stay at her family's Lane's End Farm, which is located in Versailles, Kentucky. Lane's End has bred and developed many top racehorses, including Zenyatta.

"I think growing up on a farm where I wasn't at a training barn required me to be involved, and I think it's important to be involved in their fitness and care routine," said Farish. "It's more enjoyable to be involved in the daily regimen, too. We are in it together, and knowing everything about your horse really makes a difference. You know if he's feeling not quite right; I think it can really help you in the show ring.

"Even when I'm at Heritage Farm training or showing, I stay involved. You can always take the time to brush your horse or set jumps or dig up weeds along the outside of the ring," she added, clearly recalling a specific skill set in her repertoire. "There's always something to be done around the barn; just jump in and get

"We are in it together, and knowing everything about your horse really makes a difference," said Daisy Farish, pictured with her horse Great White.



MEGAN LACY/USHJA ARCHIVES

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—Dylan Laiken

involved. There are 30 seconds that you're jumping in the ring, but so many more that go into getting there."

Dylan Laiken is a 12-year-old owner from La Canada, California, who earned team and individual gold medals at the USHJA Children's Jumping Championships at the Adequan/FEI North American Junior and Young Rider Championships. She also advocates for owner involvement, stressing, "Make sure you're the one who is taking care of your horse and you're doing what's best for your horse, not just what's best for you."

Laiken keeps her horses between Our Day Farm in Elgin, Illinois, and Hansen



KAITLYN KARSEN

Dam Equestrian Center, in California, but always keep on top of their routine. She spends most of her time, when not in school, at the barn. Even when she's not with her horses, she knows their program and what work is being done with them.

She also noted that she rarely jumps

Dylan Laiken and Callao

her horses at home, opting instead for poles and flatwork to help her in the show ring. Given her Olympic Games aspirations, Laiken practices this training regimen to maximize her jumping time in the show ring.

"Horses only have so many jumps in their feet; I choose to focus mine in the show ring," she said. "Owning a horse means a lot of responsibility to me—a lot of passion and a lot of care."

Recently, Debbie Bass has been working with a sports psychologist to help improve performances in the show ring. The psychologist said that Bass needed to be spending more time with horses and reconnect with them.

"She pointed out that I hadn't been connecting with my horse on a horsey level and that I needed to just take my horse out and graze him," said Bass. "As I made more time for that type of connection, it's impacted my riding, and it's just nice to be with them and be present. Spending time with your horses is an important part of horse ownership. Take the time to be present."

Didi Mackenzie noted that owners looking for ways to get more involved with their horses just have to take the initiative. "Even small things can make a difference: Notice their eyes, feel their legs before you get on, acknowledge their mood. It's really that easy," she said. 🐾