

What I Wish I'd Known Before I Started Showing

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Bailey Anderson (pictured here) with her trainer, Terry Cross. Photo © Dawn Knight

Remember that moment of startling clarity? That all-too-familiar time you learned that it does matter which side of the cone you start on? Or that hoof polish is nearly impossible to remove right before entering the show pen? Whether it was a dose of humility or a valuable learning experience, nearly every competitor today remembers those modest first steps. Look back and laugh with us as top competitors share what they wish they'd known in the beginning.

Bailey Anderson--(pictured right with trainer, Terry Cross) When I was younger, Terry Cross, my trainer, used to make me run laps as punishment for having to tell me things multiple times like putting my right heel down, which I always struggled with. So I wish I'd known to put my heel down sooner, so I didn't have to run as many laps! I also wish I would have known how much heartbreak horses could cause. We had to put my first horse, Mystic Illusion, down and my previous horse, Krusin Krymsun, suffered a very unexpected injury where we again had to put him down. I also wish I'd known the tiny girl sitting in the seat next to me on a plane flying to the Sun Circuit in my 11 and under days would be my best friend, Avery Ellis. I would have gotten to know her sooner. And of course, I wish I'd known how addicting horses are and how they can quickly become the thing your life revolves around. I could have warned my parents that this is what I would be living and breathing the rest of my life!



Jason Wanderer--I wish I'd known (or chosen to understand) that an error in a class, or penalty in a pattern, is not the end of the world and truly your only option is to continue to ride on to the best of your ability to the next obstacle, maneuver or class. One challenge does not mean all is lost and your entire class or day is over. I remember after my horse once spooked at the flash of a camera saying to AQHA Judge Betsy Tuckey, "that was a total disaster" and she looked at me with a puzzled look and replied "you did not have a disaster; you had a single mistake". Looking back, if I would have grasped that concept earlier I would have avoided a lot of time harping on one tick!



Ali Grusha--When I first started showing Appaloosas in 1999, I always hated it when my mom would criticize my rides, spray too much hairspray directly in my face, or not allow me to miss one night at the barn when I wanted to hang out with friends. Now, 15 years later, multiple World top tens, Congress tops tens and a Congress win has allowed me to see the light. Having an amazing show mom has been a huge part of my success. My mom comes with me to every show. I tried to go once without her, and I had to call her and make her come "rescue" me! She is a perfectionist, and I value her opinions more than anyone's. She's my number one fan and my biggest supporter. I know a lot of my show friends have great show moms too. We may not love them at all times but, they are definitely a big part of showing and have been a big part of making us the riders and competitors we are today.



Heather Harkey--When I started showing the AQHA circuit I was nine, I am now 29. Something I wish I would have known then is that every time I did not win it was actually a blessing in the end. I used to get discouraged and beat myself up but as I continued my show career I realized you learn from your mistakes and makes you work harder and appreciate the win more in the long run. Everyone wants to get in this business and start just winning. Well, it doesn't happen that way. It takes years of hauling and lessons and mistakes to get to the winner's circle. I am very happy that I stuck it out to reap the benefits. Also I never knew I would have a second family and lifelong friends in the horse show community.



Lauren Crivelli--I have been involved with horses almost my whole life. We started out going to open shows, and worked our way up to the national level. It was a great experience learning to ride all types of horses, but if I could do it again, I would have bought a high quality horse from the beginning. It costs the same amount of money to show a naughty one as it does to show a good one. It will end up saving money if you buy one good one. Also, always be a good sport--win, lose, or draw, we are all doing this for the love of horses.



Carey Nowacek--There are many things I wish I had known at the beginning of my horse show life. Honestly, in 1999 I wish I had known my trainer was as novice as I was (haha sorry, Brad!) On a serious note, the real thing I wish I had known were the ins and outs of the

rule book. When I started showing Quarter Horses we didn't understand what Novice classes really were. I would go into every class at every horse show trying to get points to point out. Yes, my goal was to point out and I did, quickly. I thought that's what we were supposed to do. In hindsight, I kick myself because I needed those Novice years to grow and learn.



Paige Kemper--I wish I would've known that just because you think it was your best ride, the judges may not agree. When I was younger, I always thought I was being ignored by the judges and not getting the placings I deserved, but as I got older I figured out that even though you give it your 100%, some horses may be better than yours, or an exhibiter may ride better than you. I didn't understand this when I was little, but you have to watch everybody, and I mean really watch. You can learn and see so much from other people and then you realize "oh...that's why they beat me." Even when you give it your best, there sometimes is somebody better; and that's okay, because it gives you a goal to aim for. If you stay within your own little box, you'll lose every time. Push the limit, because the person winning buckles isn't going to wait for you.



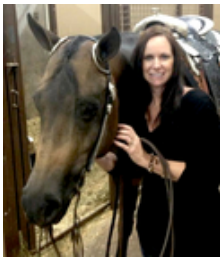
Micah Howard--I wish I had known just how long and hard you have to work to make a green horse and a novice rider an all-around combination. Hindsight is 20/20, probably would have been easier to have spent more money on a finished horse. Also, if I'd really read the rule book (like the trainer asked me to), squashing a cone is a big deal in any class with a cone, no matter how otherwise perfect your pattern is. Finally, that 3X hat I bought because I was a tightwad loses its shape in humid weather. I had no clue about this misfortune until Charlene Carter pulled me aside after a rather humid day of showing, and gave me the 411 on the necessity of regular hat shaping. Looking back, I must have looked a lot like Hoss from Bonanza with my big, flat hat. Moral of that story is to either shape your hat regularly or buy one that holds its shape.



Eric Mendrysa--What I wish I would have known when I started showing is knowing that this passion of mine for horses would have turned into a career and something that I love doing everyday. Being able to combine my love for graphic design and photography and showing has been such a blessing and has allowed me to reach goals and have horses I never could have dreamed of owning at this stage in my showing career. Looking back, I wish I would have started my design and photography business in high school knowing it would have been such a big part of my life and turned into my career.



Lindsey Gillette--I wish that I had listened to my trainers, Andrew and Lori Augsburger more from the beginning. I have always been known to put an immense amount of pressure on myself to try to be perfect every time I enter the show pen. Andrew and Lori would always tell me, "its just another horse show, and there's always another one next weekend". At first I wouldn't ever take this to heart, and would end up dwelling on every mistake rather than celebrating each improvement, no matter how small. Maybe if I had realized from the beginning that Andrew's little sayings were true, I would have become a more confident rider from the start. Who knew trainers were so wise and actually know what they are talking about?



Candice Hall--My husband, Cory, wishes he had known never to jump in the back of the six horse trailer and surprise a yearling after a long haul. He got kicked, and he walked on a broken leg for two weeks at the horse show. Once we were home he got me to x-ray his leg at my vet clinic. Diagnosis--fractured tibia! He proceeded to take his x-ray films to emergency and asked to see a doctor and then he was rushed into surgery. He still has two screws in his leg... Good lesson!



Alyssa Casa--What I wish I had known when I first started showing was more about the quality of horses, tack, and clothes etc. When I was younger I didn't have my horse in training and did mostly everything on my own--which I wouldn't change but I know I would have been more successful had I known everything it takes to be competitive. If you want to be successful, you need a good horse and a trainer to guide you through showing. Whether it's lessons, picking out show clothes, or deciding what horse shows you should go to. There are so many details that go into making a successful horse and rider, that it's really difficult to do it on your own anymore and be competitive on a national level. In having this experience myself, I'm thankful that I've met so many great people who have helped so much throughout the years, whom without I wouldn't be where I am today.



Susie Johns--I've been showing since I was a little girl so there are many things. However, the one thing though that I've come to appreciate more than anything is that this is a hobby and I'm blessed every day I'm still able to ride. I don't take any day in the saddle for granted. Life is so unpredictable and I enjoy horse shows now more for being

around my friends, horses and family than for the competition. My dad always used to say, "Stop and smell the roses" and I think that's what everyone should do. If things don't always go great, there is always another horse show and the sun will always come up the next day. Just be grateful for each day given to you



Heather Young--Through many years coaching youth riders, I have come to learn the vast knowledge and experience a young person gains through horse show competition. Not only do they gain a sense of responsibility they gain self-confidence and belief in themselves that carries over into real world situations. This confidence and belief enables them to excel in their education, career, and life experiences. These experiences mold them into confident, successful

young adults with memories that last a life time. I wish I'd known the impact the relationship with the horse goes far beyond the show pen. As a child and teenager I had no idea what the relationship with the horse was developing. I always thought it was a "hobby" a competitive sport; but as a trainer/coach I have come to know the impact the horse has on a young person's life.



Chelsea Martz--When I first started showing, I had no idea how friendly and welcoming everyone in the industry would be. It's easy to be intimidated when it seems like everyone knows each other. I have met some of the nicest people and made great friends. I also had no idea how much horse shows turn into a family event. I feel so blessed to be a part of the AQHA family.



Blake Weis--Great horses make great horse trainers not the other way around. Also, it is more important in the long run to have a group of great clients rather than have a group of really nice horses that have rotten owners.