

Friendship Team

by Carole Dwinell

Take a number of Silver and Gold Medal Vaulters from across the country, add a couple or three horses from somewhere else, stir in some music and choreography, give it a quick mix for one or two days. Stir in a steady circle and present to an audience of amazed people. You can do THAT on a horse?

Yes, we can.

The Friendship Team has been educating and



Photo: Primo Ponies Photography

entertaining audiences across the country since 1995. Priscilla Faulkner and the team crew cover the gamut from choosing a horse to safe dismounts, from an overview of equipment to the compulsory exercises that form the basis for correct vaulting and for the fabulous freestyle routines that one sees at these demonstrations and at competitions.

What the Friendship Team mainly does in addition to introducing the sport of vaulting to spectators at a myriad of different venues, is build friendships, confidence in skills and a camaraderie across age differences, hometown locations, ethnic background, and gender. Vaulting, and especially the non-competitive Friendship Team, builds the sort of confidence that spills over into all aspects of life.

This year's World Equestrian Games was the culmination of a long road of vaulting demonstrations by the ever changing roster of vaulters. From trade fairs to Rolex, from Equine Affaire to the Olympics (two of them!) these demonstrations of skill and consideration for the horse and each other have promoted vaulting across the US and even in Calgary, Canada. First time ever WEG in Lexington was no exception. "There are people watching us from all over the WORLD!" says 17-year old vaulter Kate Thomas. That was her comment after their afternoon performance on a sunny afternoon at the Horse Park.



Photo: Carole Dwinell



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What IS it about vaulting? Jamie Wantland, who has been vaulting for about five years says, "Well, it's a real bonding sport, it's a real team oriented sport. I mean there's all the vaulters and a horse. Vaulting is like really different!"

About the Friendship Team, Tessa Divita agrees, "We just met on Friday and we've all become like best friends. So, meet on Friday and ... suddenly we're a team." A team that's performing doubles and triples on a cantering horse. One doesn't, of course, just hop on and do that sort of thing. It's the combined effort of lots of training, lots of trust, and then ... there's strength, suppleness, stretch and balance. If you can stand up on a cantering horse, you can pretty much do anything.



Photo: Primo Ponies Photography

This group of exciting young vaulters are the ultimate ambassadors for the sport. It's obvious that they're

having the time of their life and that enthusiasm has been instrumental in the growth of the sport of vaulting.