

# A recipe for success



**I** have a friend named Cindy who has recently gotten back into horses as an adult. She had horses as a child, but admits she didn't have much formal training. Those who know her now are astonished at how quickly her equestrian skills are developing. But Cindy has a helpful method: she asks tons of questions. So everyone knows she is learning. She will ask anyone and everyone questions, and she seeks support in her growth as an equestrian and a trail rider.

I have found that the right support produces the fastest growth in horsemanship. Effective support comes from many places, but most importantly from a balanced team of knowledgeable groups and individuals. Here is my recipe for growth as an equestrian and a trail rider.

## The right partner

Have you ever seen a couple that just wasn't meant to be together? One + one = continual turmoil. Though the mismatch looks obvious from the outside, it is almost impossible to try and convince either person that their partner may not be "the one." After all, "I love him/her".

Building confidence on the trail takes a special partner. It is important that your partner is supportive and builds you up. Your horse is your equine partner on your trail riding team. If your confidence is low or struggling, your high-spirited horse may not be the answer for now. Maybe an interim (calmer) equine partner would be better suited to help you build your confidence. In the horse world, this is okay, unlike in human partnerships. Not all horses are well-suited for trail riding, as not all humans are meant for horses.

Here are a few questions to determine if you and your current horse create a good partnership on the trail. Does time with your horse increase or decrease your confidence? Is your horse's confidence as great as your confidence? Are you able to go for new adventures often, or is your horse keeping you in one place? Do you have your horse just because you love him, or does he allow you to participate in the equestrian activities you desire?

## The right trainer

Find a trainer or riding instructor who shares your passion for the equestrian activities you desire. If a trainer or instructor is constantly pushing you to pursue their discipline, and their discipline is not your goal, it probably is not a good match. Most professional instructors or trainers can teach basic riding skills. But preparation for specific equestrian activities, including trail riding, requires specific knowledge and training.

Ask to watch the trainer or instructor at work, before you sign on. Are they positive? Psychologists have calculated that it takes ten positive comments to balance one critical comment. If you want to build confidence, then criticism is not what you need. Also watch

out for "bombardment" coaching. If the instructor is throwing out tons of comments on all sorts of different subjects, beware. Find an instructor who focuses and works on one, maybe two, points until the lesson is learned. Don't be afraid to ask if a trainer has any certifications or has completed a formal training program. Unfortunately, in the U.S., anyone can call themselves a horse trainer or riding instructor. Those who are serious have sought formal training and evaluation. Ask other equestrians you respect for their opinions about particular prospective instructors or trainers.

## Find a mentor

Trainers and instructors are very important. But you can also learn a lot from a seasoned trail veteran. They don't have to be a professional to give you valuable tips and helpful advice. No one learns everything from just one person. Find a trail rider who has a serene demeanor on their horse, with a calm and well-mannered horse. If both seem relaxed and secure, this is probably a person you can learn a lot from. Ask them to go on rides with you and watch them carefully. They are not instructors and may not have techniques for communicating what they do instinctively. But a veteran equestrian has a wealth of knowledge just waiting to be tapped.

Trail buddies! Finding a safe and enjoyable group of trail buddies to ride with may take some time. Start with finding one other compatible person to ride with. Ask questions about the type of trail riding they do. How fast do they ride? How difficult are the trails? What kind of obstacles can you expect? How long do they ride? etc. Remember to ask about their horse, do they kick, bite or spook easily? Riding with a good trail buddy can build your confidence quickly. But one who rides wilder than you are comfortable with can quickly destroy your confidence. Pick your trail riding friends carefully.

For even more support and a variety of trail adventures, you may also want to join trail groups and associations. Competition group members are sometimes not as eager to share ideas and tips as non-competitive trail group riders. Again, don't be afraid to ask a lot of questions up front. Find out about what is important to you. What kind of activities do they do? Does the group drink alcohol at rides? Do they allow smoking on the trail? What terrains do they like and what speeds do they usually travel? Is it "walk" only, or do they also trot and/or canter? Does the club have riding etiquette rules? Ask to see the rules and ask if the rules are followed. This information will help you in finding good trail buddies.

The right partner, trainer, mentors and trail buddies will add to your success and enjoyment as a trail rider. Choose each of them carefully. Growth as an equestrian comes from this balanced combination. Are you giving yourself all the support you need for success and growth in your equestrian trail adventures? **R!**

In 2003 Garry Stauber completed a 1350 mile, 3 ½ month horseback trip, riding the length of California with a packhorse. He is on the Board of Directors of the Ohlone Riders of the Backcountry Horsemen of California, DreamPower Horsemanship Foundation, and the Aromas Hills Trail Club. He is also a member of the Long Riders Guild. Garry has written articles for Trail Rider and the Bay Area Equestrian Network ([www.bayquest.com](http://www.bayquest.com)). Garry's trip is chronicled on his website at [www.dream-adventures.com](http://www.dream-adventures.com) and on the Long Riders Guild site at [www.thelongridersguild.com/LRG.htm](http://www.thelongridersguild.com/LRG.htm).