



Try It: You'll Like It!

Auburn Excell advocates the many splendors of eventing.

Orange County trainer Auburn Excell-Brady's enthusiasm for eventing is infectious. Spend a few minutes chatting with this vivacious individual and you'll believe that you, too, can go galloping over a course of natural obstacles, sail over stadium jumps and succeed well enough in dressage, no matter your riding background or budget.

Auburn will have you believing that because it's true. A partner with her mentor Ginnie Bryant in Equites Riding Club, she has a clientele that ranges from kids to adults of all ages, including a group of men who ride with Auburn before work in the morning. They are all having a blast pursuing some or all of the varied horsemanship components that comprise the eventing lifestyle.

Equites is based at the privately-owned Rio Vista Stables in San Juan Capistrano. Ginnie emphasizes show jumping training and Auburn focuses on eventing, but there is a lot of overlap within the long-running program. They both feel that, because Orange County does not have any major eventing venues, the area's riders are not aware of local opportunities to get involved with the sport.

One visit to Rio Vista will disabuse anyone of that notion. On Nov. 10, the stable hosts its second Derby during which all are welcome to ride a dressage test and try their hand at a jumping round that combines stadium and cross-country fences. The stable's recently completed course includes a three-sided bank with a ramp, a small ditch and a larger, framed "coffin" ditch suitable for more experienced horses and riders. Gates, logs and natural obstacles round out the course. It presents a perfect opportunity for equitation, hunter or jumper riders to experience cross-country jumping. Non-boarders are welcome to haul-in to school under Auburn's supervision.

For those accustomed to riding in an arena all the time, eventing does require some nerve, but not nearly as much as some might think. With an Introductory level that features fences under 2' in height and simple courses, proper preparation and a sense of adventure are all that's needed.

The maximum height for Beginner Novice is 2'7", Novice is 2'11" and Training Level is 3'3".

"I believe that a combined training program is really a wonderful balance for all horses and riders regardless of experience," Auburn says. "You can always start at the beginning and move up to the level where you are most comfortable."

The advent of "half star" competitions has helped make the sport more accessible at the lower levels from both a skill and an expense standpoint. "Event horses come in all shapes and sizes. The horses usually enjoy the change of work outside the arena and the introductory levels are inviting and designed to build confidence for both horse and rider.

Auburn has frequently been a volunteer clinician during fundraising events at Galway Downs in Temecula and reports that hunter/jumper riders who venture out for clinics typically consider it a great experience and have a great time.

Variety is advocated at Equites. "We do a bit of everything with most of my clients," Auburn explains. During downtime in the Southern California eventing scene, they attend dressage shows and contest jumping classes on the hunter/jumper circuit. Conversely, eventing can be a great training supplement for regular hunter/jumper competitors. Ginnie's long time student, FEI jumper rider Molly Talla, took her Grand Prix show jumper in a Novice event this past summer and loved it, Auburn reports.

Many Benefits

Eventing is a many splendored thing, Auburn asserts. Expenses for a standard horse trial in our area rarely top \$400, including entry fees and stabling and bedding. Most riders do their own grooming and braiding. The latter is only required for the dressage, and for those who don't do their own braiding, there are plenty of kids available to do the task at a reasonable price.

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The format enables riders to spend a lot of quality time with their horses and success in this discipline is simply not possible without being a good horseman. Spread over three phases of competition, its rigors require knowledge of conditioning, stamina, pace regulation and other considerations that are less critical to success in other disciplines.

"All preparations are made before we leave our barn for the show," Auburn explains. "All tack cleaned and boots polished; all wraps, show pads and other gear is checked off on a list and packed in the trunk so when we arrive at the facility the weekend runs smoothly and the riders are focused on the riding and overall care of their horse without worrying about forgotten items or extra work.



Photo: Sherri Sieb Photography, www.sherrisiebphotography.com

"I always walk each of the cross-country courses with my riders on the first day and discuss a plan that suits each individual rider. This way they can walk through the course again several times to get comfortable with the terrain and obstacles before they have their actual ride in competition."

Perhaps most importantly, it is a fun sport pursued by a lot of fun people. Auburn's crew at Equites enjoys a unique type of summer school. "We typically do one competition per month, then I encourage our parents to let their kids do something special in the summer." One year, Auburn took several young students up to Rebecca Farms in Montana, home of the famous three day event. It included a long drive, a layover at a friend's lovely ranch and 10 days at the venue itself.

Camping out at events, trips to ride on the beach and other excursions are all part of the program at Equites.

It's the stuff Auburn dreamed of as a kid and has no intention of outgrowing. Raised by a hard working single mom, she found a pony in the *Penny Saver*, convinced the owner to sell it for \$500, then convinced her grandmother to buy it for her. Next it was knocking on neighbors' doors until someone allowed her to trade backyard boarding for stall mucking and feeding chores.

She was lucky to land at Ginnie's Equites Riding Club, where she quickly secured the post of working student. Ginnie steered Auburn from show jumping toward eventing as a more realistic path for a rider of average financial means and Auburn has yet to regret one step of her journey since. With Ginnie's guidance, she trained a \$1,000 off-the-track Thoroughbred into an FEI Two-Star eventer. She sold him to a young rider and has since brought several horses along to the upper



Photo: Sherri Sieb Photography, www.sherrisiebphotography.com

levels of the sport. She's currently excited about her newest prospect, Royal Lux.

Auburn and Ginnie are thrilled to base Equites at Rio Vista Stables. Situated right next to Sycamore Trails Equestrian Center, Rio Vista has been recently refurbished and offers many amenities. In addition to the new cross-country course, it has a standard dressage court with full mirrors, Grand Prix show jumps and premium footing in all the arenas. Auburn was based at Sycamore Trails for many years and she is happy to coach riders and train horses who board there, along with any who want to haul into Rio Vista for lessons or training.

Equites supports horses and riders from the introductory to international levels. Horsemanship and pony camps are part of the program, as is the sale of consignment horses.



For more information, visit www.excellequestrian.com or call Auburn Excell-Brady at 949-228-2827.

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