

Prez Sez, February 2024

I recently received one of the most disrespectful emails that I have ever received. It started with, "The non horsemen board members would prefer that no one ever use the facilities for some unknown reason."

I started riding when I was 14. I have been a member of PVRA since 1994. I spent a lot of time in adult group, taking lessons and riding on the grounds. However, I inherited my daughter's Prix St. Georges dressage horse that is just too much for me so I don't ride him. It's not that I didn't try---I just broke too many bones on him. The last time he bucked me off was the day before my fifth surgery to repair my right hand, So someone else is riding him now, but I spend a lot of time caring for him and making sure he lives out his Elder Statesman years happily.

When I first joined PVRA, the arenas were sometimes "lffy," but for the most part they were well maintained. Then when I became a show manager, I slowly watched in horror as the grounds deteriorated when we had a caretaker who, quite frankly, wasn't doing his job, and PVRA became known for its "bad footing".

We have spent the last 6 years improving the footing, trying to improve that reputation. We built a solid base in Ring 2 and Dressage and brought in good top footing, spending thousands of dollars in the process.

The last thing I want to do is to keep members from riding on the grounds. But I have a long-view on preserving that footing and our reputation.

PVRA just does not handle rain well. It's a fact. It also doesn't dry out particularly fast. Often, it will look fine on top but will be squishy or slick underneath. That is when it is most dangerous to horses. I had a horse that needed a 7-month lay-up for tearing his anterior tarsus ligament after slipping in the arena at PVRA. I can name at least 10 other horses injured with pulled ligaments and tendons. Now that can happen in the best of conditions, but when it is dry on top and slick underneath, the risks are particularly high.

Someone recently suggested we let members "ride at their own risk". There are two problems with that. The first is that it risks the well-being of our horses. I simply do not want any horses injured on our grounds, especially when it can be prevented by making sure the footing is good.

The second is that when a 1200 lb horse is ridden in a soft base, they risk putting their hoofs through the top layer and piercing through the base underneath. This will ruin the base. One of the ways you can check for that is to dig underneath the wet footing and make sure that it is not ponding and hasn't soaked through the base. You can check this easily by digging a hole in the top layer and checking the base underneath to make sure it is still hard. I have learned this through 30 years of membership at PVRA. You can't tell this from the outside of the arena. You have to walk into the wet spots and check. When people tell me the grounds look good, I have to ask if they actually "walked through the wet spots in the arenas" to check them.

Right now, the Dressage arena has a particular problem with leaves. It can't be dragged until it is raked because otherwise you mix the leaves into the footing. That's why Sam and I have both been raking before Dressage is dragged after a rain storm.

On a happier note, I hope you all will attend the February meeting held at the Mainstream Bar & Grill at 7 pm on Tuesday February 6th. We will have year end awards for 2023. Please come out and support our winners.

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