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# RIDING

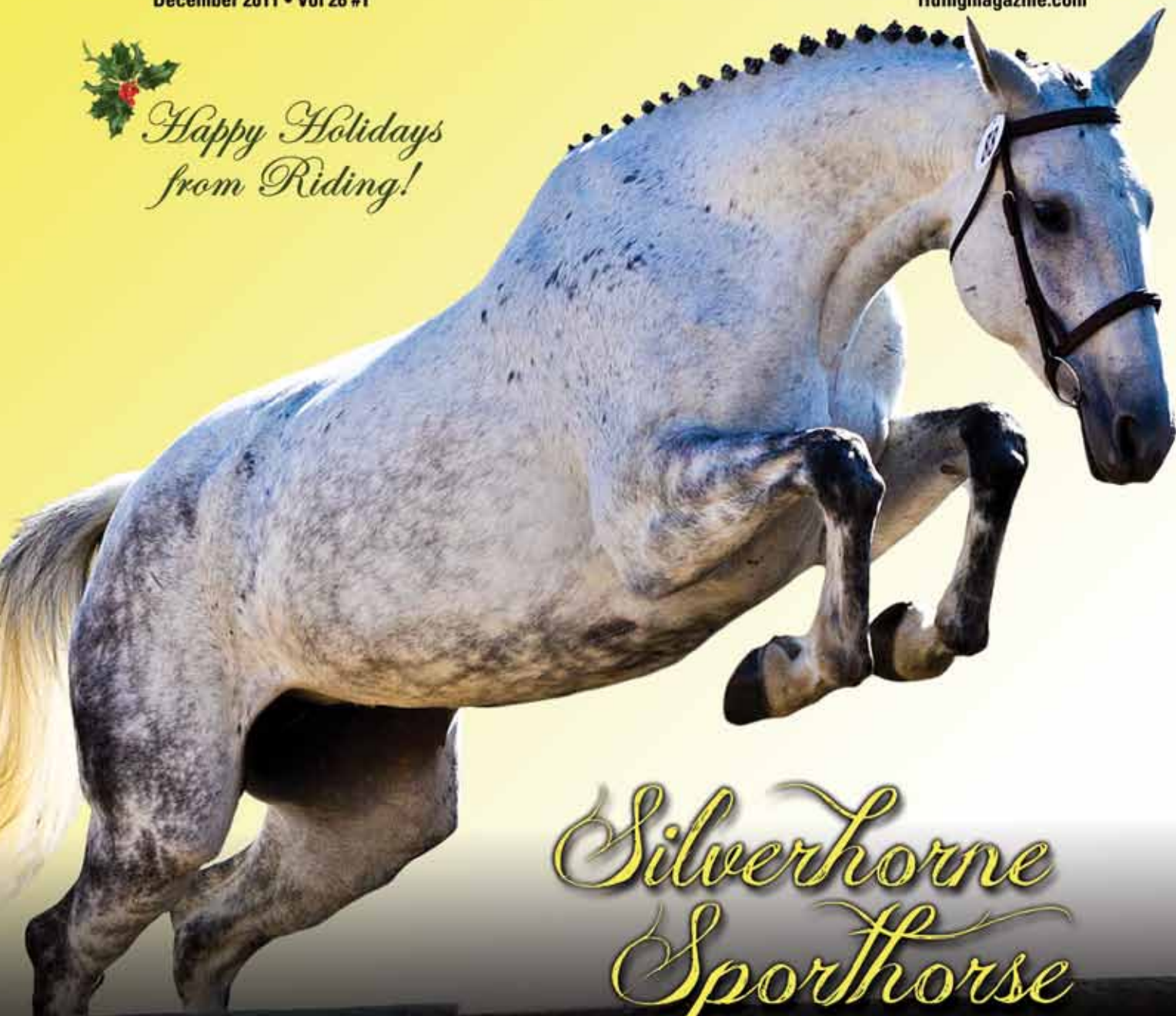
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*Happy Holidays  
from Riding!*



*Silverhorne  
Sporthorse*

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Silverhorse Sporthorse's Sahara.  
Photo: © Sheri Scott



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Silverhorse Sporthorse's St Pauli Girl. Photo: © Sheri Scott

### Cover Story: Silverhorse Sporthorse

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# Silverhorse Sporthorse

Breeding program believes the right start is important for even the best bloodlines.

Barb Gualco is not capable of resting on her laurels. Since she began breeding in 1997, Silverhorse Sporthorse has continually added new chapters to its legacy.

She started by assembling a significant bank of well-bred imports from strong German-based bloodlines and then brought the Hanoverian stallion Sir Caletto on board in 2002. Silverhorse continues to produce quality horses for the hunter/jumper community. It is readily apparent when you visit Silverhorse that there is a lot to show for a well thought-out horse development program. The 80-acre breeding and training facility near Sacramento has earned a solid reputation as a source for horses with athletic ability, great temperaments and nice conformation.

Silverhorse is deeply committed to getting all of its youngsters off to a great start as the best way to capitalize on their breeding program. According to Barb, "it's really every breeder's ultimate desire to have their youngsters either sold into good training barns where they will get to a buyer who wants to compete or you develop your own raising and starting program as we've done here."

Barb was first exposed to the effectiveness of a more natural style of horsemanship training techniques back in 2005. In February of this year she brought Chris Cook and Lisa Dumper on board. As resident trainers, their primary focus is to start youngsters, develop them and thus build a

foundation for effective and successful horse/rider partnerships for the competitive rider.

The goal is to develop horses that are confident, happy in their work and readily cooperative and responsive to their riders. In the process, their bodies develop to maximize the conformational advantages they inherited from their carefully-paired parents.

"We are producing good-minded horses who are encouraged to think and be self-supportive so that when they leave this program they are also prepared to succeed as a result of the educational advantages the program has provided them," adds Gualco.

## Natural Horsemanship Techniques

Barb became a believer in natural horsemanship techniques when she wanted to prepare six Sir Caletto offspring for the International Hunter Futurity in Del Mar in 2005. In just 60 days, they were ready to excel. "They were happy and relaxed and behaved very well in the show ring and the show environment," she recalls. After many years in the business, she's seen the negative results of short-cuts in starting young horses and is thrilled to embrace the style of training. "Specific, methodical steps in the colt starting process build a tremendous amount of confidence in the horse, which is required in a great competition partner," she continues.

The next step, building a foundation for riding, teaches the horse to easily move off the leg and seat while respecting the aid of the reins. It starts with being ridden in a halter and bareback "so they fully understand how to carry and move with a rider and, most importantly, accept the human," Barb says. "I certainly did not develop the style of training, but I recognized its value and the need to spend quality as well as a quantity of time with each horse daily, something every rider appreciates in a good relationship with the horse. We spend a great deal of time cultivating that relationship which will translate very well for buyers.

"I looked for trainers who were interested in bringing the ideas of Buck Brannaman, Martin Black, Pat Parelli and Tom Dorrance as well as Glenn Stewart and Peter Fuller as to how to colt start and develop an excellent foundation of gaits in the horses I am breeding," Barb says. And she found them in Chris Cook and his partner, Lisa Dumper, who are full-time in residence at Silverhorse.

Over the summer, *California Riding Magazine* visited Silverhorse Sporthorse for an impressive demonstration of the work Barb is so invested in. As his white cowboy hat alludes, Chris arrived at his natural horsemanship techniques from a western riding background. But he is no stranger to starting the Warmbloods and has really excelled, as has Lisa, who came upon it by way of the hunter/jumper circuit. Their training techniques are built on

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Susie Three

Charlotte York

Scarlett O'Hara

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understanding how the horse thinks and is motivated while using that knowledge to gain and earn trust and cooperation.

Chris explained that their system for starting a young horse always puts the relationship between horse and handler first. Gaining trust is the first step in the process of “asking permission to ride.” He demonstrated some of the exercises involved in the process with a lovely mare named Godiva, with whom he’d previously worked just a few hours. Chris gradually desensitized Godiva to his use of a long stick with a plastic bag tied to the end, as a forerunner to the more traditional lunge whip, by example. “To develop an acceptance of a human riding her, I first want to teach her not to be afraid of my tools,” he explained. Initially, the tool is the plastic bag or, later, a large blue tarp on the ground, but later it will be a saddle. “We are crossing the prey/predator barriers,” he said. Getting the horse comfortable with having the tarp over its back was a precursor to gaining her confidence when Chris draped first his body, then his leg, up and over her back.

Once the horse is comfortable with a human’s tools, getting the horse to accept pressure is the beginning of establishing control. From the ground, Chris gently applied the stick and plastic bag alternately to Godiva’s neck and haunches, getting her to yield those body parts. “Win the feet and you win the mind,” Chris noted. When she made even the lightest response—a twitch of her skin in the right area—the trainer rewarded her by stroking her lightly with the plastic bag. These baby steps were all about “gaining rudimentary control of her body while keeping her in a learning/thinking frame of mind, rather than a reactive/fear frame of mind.”

### Puzzle Solvers

“We want to develop horses that are not just surviving, but are thinking, they are solving puzzles,” Barb added. “A jump course is a puzzle. A dressage test is a puzzle.” Some of the desensitization process involved approach and retreat games meant to pique the horse’s curiosity and set the stage for instilling confidence when faced with new situations. “It’s not about stepping on a tarp or having it draped on their back, it comes down to helping the horse be confident in most situations,” Barb explained. It’s exercises like these that develop the educated horses.

The program also fosters up and coming trainers who, like Chris and Lisa, are pursuing career tracks of their own. Rachel Dunn provides support to the horse development program with groundwork and backing under the tutelage of Chris. And the team is rounded out with the excellent grooming style of Mary Gowan.

The American Hanoverian Society inspectors were also quite impressed with the Silverhorse horses. Eight Silverhorse bred mares took the mare performance test and aced the riding portion of the test with high marks for rideability at the AHS inspection held at the ranch this past October. (See story, page 18) “It’s the real measure of the success of this style of starting and training horses,” Barb enjoys saying. “We ended up with the riding horse championship when Susie Three was awarded an

8.36 score, making her the third highest scored mare in the U.S. with 9s on jump. We also ended up with three elite mare candidates, the over-all inspection champion mare, the non-Hanoverian champion mare, who is an Oldenburg and several others achieving 8s for their rideability. All the mares were trained under the guiding principles of natural horsemanship.”

“This program fosters a great connection between horse and rider and makes the horse a much safer partner,” Barb explains. “The foundation we build creates seamless transitions between the gaits and makes jumping a delightful experience for the rider and fun for the horse.” And it’s all done without drilling or excessive lunging, which Barb abhors for horses of any age. “Especially for young horses whose bodies, legs and minds are still developing.”

Barb’s background includes many years as a breeder and raiser of young sporthorses and she’s a keen observer of trends in sporthorse breeding and training. Spending time working with German and American trainers over the years has given her a range of perspective on the industry and it seems she has landed on a plan and program that supports a very good life for the horses she is responsible for breeding. Watching the horses thrive through Silverhorse’s embrace of natural horsemanship techniques has brought new levels of joy to her work. The horses’ willing and relaxed attitudes suggest that they feel the same.



For more information, visit [www.silverhorse.com](http://www.silverhorse.com).  
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