

A-CIRCUIT ALEXIS

welcome to A-Circuit Alexis, a blog dedicated to informing new competitors on the mayhem that is the Norcal Hunter/Jumper community!



What to expect

- ★ welcome to the Norcal A-circuit! The Norcal hunter/jumper community is an incredibly supportive group of people who come together to compete but also connect over the mutual love of horses and jumping. As someone who has spent a large portion of my life as a member of this community, I can say with great certainty that this community has so much to offer in terms of learning and personal growth.
- ★ I started showing on the A-circuit when I was 11. Because I started riding at a competitive show barn, the step into competition was a natural progression for me. With that said, some people enter the showing community at a young age, while some riders don't start showing until they are well into their adult years. The community shows no bias against either; there are classes to suit all levels and ages of riders, from leadline classes up until Grand Prix level.
- ★ when it comes to becoming a hunter/jumper expert in Norcal, my #1 suggestion is time and exposure. Even if you aren't ready to show quite yet, it is crucial that you go and watch a day or two at a show to get a hang of the way the it flows. If you aren't sure where to go for a show, be sure to check out the Norcal H/J website, which provides updates for what is going on in the community. Rated shows are normally 5 days long, wednesday-sunday, from February-November all over northern California. Members of the community can stay connected with others through Facebook and keep updated through the Norcal Newsletters that go out every once in awhile.
(<http://www.norcalhunterjumpers.com/show-calendar>)



What is a hunter/jumper?

- ★ There are three "divisions" to hunter/jumper shows, including hunters, jumpers, and equitation. In the H/J community, it is typically the trainer who decides what division best suits you and your horse, but be sure to speak up if there's a particular division you want to try out!
- ★ The "hunter" part is based off of the early tradition of fox hunting. Hunter divisions are judged on the style of the horse; how well it moves, how well it jumps, expression, and overall quality of the jumping round.
- ★ Jumper divisions are judged objectively based on each horse and rider's speed over a predetermined course¹ of jumps, the pair with the fastest time and least amount of fallen rails², or faults, is the winner.
- ★ Equitation is judged on the position and ability of the rider over the course of jumps. Like hunters, attention to detail is very important in equitation, particularly at the higher levels.



FOR THE LOVE OF HORSES...

- ★ The most important value shared within the community is the mutual love for horses. That is the reason we are all here in the first place; people don't simply come into this sport because they like to win. Most of us started out as horse-obsessed little kids who wanted nothing more than to have sleepovers in their horse's stall and never leave the barn. This is the attitude that can sometimes be lost in the midst of competition, and my message to those starting out in the showing community is to preserve that love for horses throughout your years on the show circuit.
- ★ The H/J community also places a lot of value in hard work. Horseback is not an easy sport, as I'm sure you know. Trainers take notice of which riders put in the extra effort to become better and those who skip lessons and just want to go to shows. This is synonymous with just showing up to class for a test without ever doing homework or studying. Trainers like to reward riders that put in hard work by offering them extra rides on other horses, or even the opportunity to catch-ride³ at a show.



¹ A "course" is pretty much the path of jumps each rider has to do. There are usually 8-12 jumps in each course. The course is given to riders on paper before the classes start and it is the rider's responsibility to memorize the given course. Any deviation from the set course is subject to elimination.

² Rails is referring to the poles on the jump. Some of the pictures I added may give you a better idea.

³ Catch-riding is when you show a horse that isn't yours or isn't a horse you typically ride. A lot of the time, the catch-rider won't have to pay any of the show fees to ride this horse, and it is a really great opportunity only given to riders that work hard and ride well

- ★ Good sportsmanship is also highly valued in the community. Being able to congratulate others on a job well-done, even if you aren't happy with your placing, shows maturity and respect. At horse shows, people definitely notice when riders don't have good sportsmanship, something that can cost you riding opportunities in the future. Instead of being upset or jealous after a class, try to be supportive of others and think to yourself about what you can do to improve for next time.

secondhand Learning

- ★ My trainer always told me that we learn the most from watching others. Before I attended my first rated show, I begged my mom to let me go and watch some of the older girls from my barn. I think I went to two or three shows just to watch before I actually got to show myself. There are many things I learned from watching these shows, like the fact that you always start going left in flat classes and that the horses have their mane and tails braided by professional braiders.
- ★ You can always ask your trainer to chat with you about what to expect in terms of logistics at shows; my trainer was always a fan of the sit-down meetings and although it sounds intimidating, it was certainly beneficial.
- ★ You will notice at the shows that human/horse safety is a top priority and a shared value amongst all members of the community. If something doesn't feel right about your horse or a situation, do not be afraid to speak up.
- ★ Make sure you sit down and watch other people's rounds throughout the day, particularly the upper-level riders. You can learn so much just from watching other people, and I think I can attribute a lot of my success in showing to the countless hours I spent watching top hunter riders.



- ★ The people in the hunter jumper community are very kind and welcoming to new riders. If you see something you don't understand, do not hesitate to ask someone sitting around you! We all can remember how overwhelming it was at our first horse show, and most people will be completely willing to help answer your questions.

a note about the show scene

One of the main things I have learned from competitive horseback riding is the inevitability of failure. For someone who is just starting out with competing, it may seem like you aren't a "good" rider unless you are consistently winning. This is absolutely not true.



There can be anywhere between 3 and 30+ people in your classes, and it is impractical to think that you are going to be winning at every show. **Pride** in your own performance is far more important than what ribbon you end up with. With that said, everyone has bad days. Sometimes it's the humans with the bad days and sometimes it's the horse. I've had shows where I win most of my classes and I've had shows where I didn't get a single ribbon all week. Like I said before, try to focus on your own achievements and improving yourself as a rider.

At the end of the day, we are all here because of a mutual love of horses. Don't forget that!



REMEMBER TO GIVE YOUR HORSE A HUG :)

XOXO, A-CIRCUIT ALEXIS