

Intro to Obstacles May 4, 2024

A good crowd gathered to listen to Erika Hunter and watch her put her two black mustangs through obstacles at liberty at Marcetta and Don Darenbourg's Look Sharp Farm. Artoo is a 3 coming four-year-old and Bo, a 7-year old showed us how smart and helpful and loving horses can be when they are acclimated and educated to our world.

Erika is not new to mustangs. She has competed in the Extreme Mustang Makeover and has lately become enthusiastic about Extreme Cowboy Racing.

Here in College Station, though, things were a little slower and less "extreme" which was a good thing as Erika helped a group of riders and "in-handers" navigate some of the obstacles she had set up.

The most trouble was probably caused by the tarpaulin on the ground for walking over. Erika showed how every horse, even the most seasoned one has at least one fear that is difficult to overcome. While Bo is very experienced, and will walk over empty feed bags, shaking an empty feed bag near him makes him tremble.



Erika with Bo and Artoo

Dressage horses encounter obstacles every time they are shown although these items are not labeled as



such. Flowers that beautify the arena are often objects of horror. Judges stands have been known to actually EAT horses that get too close! And banners around the arena can make horses unrecognizable to their riders.

Obstacle training is a fun way to teach your horse to trust you and look to you for leadership. First, though, one needs to be able to move the horse's feet exactly where you want them. To test this, you must have the horse knock over a cone. And then, knock it back upright again. Think this is too technical for an equine? Well, just watch Bo

or Artoo. Easy, peasy. The horses seem to enjoy the game and there are treats involved!

Well, actually, not that easy. I think we need another clinic with Erika where we do Groundwork 101, teaching the horse to move only his shoulders or his haunches or one foot or the other. More practice is needed to deconstruct some of the obstacles and perfection of the timing of the release of pressure to let the horse know when he has given the correct answer. This can reduce the horse's frustration (and

the handler's) and speed up the training significantly. Horses use body language and not so much words. Humans need to learn the horse's body language and be consistent with their own while teaching from the ground.

Lunch was provided as was birthday cake and Champagne for Marcetta's 82nd!



2Marcetta, Donna, Beth and Kelly enjoy the clinic and cake.



3Sterling and Kelly with Erika