


# CLIPPITY CLIPS



## Great riding requires a great facility

by Stacey Massey

Entering the horse world can be an overwhelming experience. With so many different riding facilities available, it can become difficult to find the right one, especially if you have no previous horse sense.

However, learning a few key elements to look for will make it easier to find a riding facility that will foster proper, safe and enjoyable riding.

Christina Starink, owner of Vision Stables and CEF certified

English riding coach has been in the riding industry since 1974. During her long tenure and her connection with the Association of Riding Establishments of Ontario, she has learned what a riding facility should and shouldn't offer.

"Safety should be the number one issue," Ms. Starink says.

This means every riding establishment should encourage its riders to wear a properly regulated riding helmet and boots. For riders under the age of 18 a proper helmet

and boots is now mandatory by law.

In her own school, Ms. Starink insists every rider wear proper gear regardless of age. She also strongly recommends every rider provide his own riding helmet and boots.

"It's like any sport, you have to buy your own equipment. Helmets should be fitted to the individual. When a stable provides helmets they don't always fit every person perfectly."

She added that "you don't know how many times a student has fallen in the helmet either."

"I think it is the responsibility of the parent to supply their child with proper gear, especially now that it's law for those under 18. If there's a concern that the child won't continue riding, there is always the option of selling used apparel."

Ms. Starink added "bicycle helmets should not be permitted, they protect a whole different part of your head. There's a reason they're designed differently."

The type of school horses and equipment available are also key clues. Though those new to the industry may have difficulty distinguishing between a good and bad piece of equipment it is easy to look for rips, missing pieces and tidiness. Ms. Starink says the equipment should always be kept clean and

tidy.

The health of the horses can be slightly easier to determine.

"Ask yourself 'how do the horses look?'" Ms. Starink says. "Do they look really scruffy or ribby? Are there cuts on their legs that look untreated? You don't really want to learn at a facility where they don't even care about the animals."

"Horses are very important for a school, so they should be well looked after."

The safety of a facility is also related to the riding area, including the size, the lighting, the type of enclosure and the ground.

"Horses have a hard time seeing depth or colours," Ms. Starink said. "If there's not enough lighting (in the riding ring) for the horse or the rider to see a fence, I consider it dangerous."

The riding area should also be properly enclosed, large enough to accommodate the number of horses being used and have stable but not extremely hard ground.

It is also important to meet with and watch the coaches.

"There should never be constant bickering or yelling at a student," Ms. Starink says. "You should hear more praise than anything."

Ms. Starink advises everyone to take their time to find a suitable facility regardless of how eager they are to ride.

"Try not to make a quick decision about the place," she says.

Before making a final decision it is important to observe one or two lessons and spend some leisure time at the facility.

"A barn should be open to having some 'hanging out happening,'" Ms. Starink said. "Viewing a lesson is the best way (to get a feel for the coach)."

"I'd be weary of some barns that won't let you see around. It's (the barn) suppose to be a semi-public place. You're suppose to be

encouraging people to ride and not to be afraid."

Most respectable riding schools will allow visitors and encourage youngsters (under supervision of course) to be around the horses.

Though Ms. Starink may take on a child rider at the age of six if they have well developed motor skills, she recommends a general age of eight to begin riding. But that doesn't mean those young horse enthusiasts are out of luck.

"Just being around a horse is all part of learning to ride. If you can't be around a horse with confidence, how can you expect to get on a horse?"

If a riding facility meets all the suggested criteria there's still no guarantee it will be ideal for you. The last thing to consider is whether you're comfortable. Like any important decision, once all the criteria have been met, the final outcome often comes from a gut instinct.

Just as no two riders are alike, no two riding establishments are either.

Ms. Starink says to always keep in mind that "riding is about learning and having fun."

## A night at Mohawk

by Stacey Massey

I have a shameful secret. I've lived in Halton my entire life and I've never been to a horse race.

Sure, I've read about them and caught myself occasionally hovering on a channel covering the sport, but being from the English side of the horse industry, I've never really taken the time to explore the sport. That is until recently when I ventured into Mohawk Raceway.

Though I frequently pass by Mohawk I had no idea what it held within its doors and I must admit, I was impressed.

As my tour guide Ken Hornick explained "People like to come here to have fun and a good night out."

He was absolutely right. I had a wonderful evening.


My companion and I began our evening at the Terrace Restaurant overlooking the track. As we watched the magnificent beasts warming up we feasted on a variety of delicious foods available from the buffet.

It seems many guests fancy the vast buffet consisting of numerous salads, vegetables, roast beef, pasta, seafood, breads and my favourite - the dessert area complete with mousse, pies, cakes, fruit, and many other yummy treats.

Having never been to the races when I arrived back at my table ready to mow down on my heaping plate I became a little worried. I thought the darkness might be due to a power failure. It only took a couple seconds to realize this was no accident, in fact this was the highlight of the night - the race was on.


As I became enthralled in the sport I decided perhaps it would be a good idea to place a few bets. Perhaps I would be one of those  
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