

About Lessons and Training:

Private lessons:

This is a chance for a rider to work one-on-one with a trainer to gain greater control over his or her body and the horse's body in various riding situations, as well as receiving help towards achieving his or her individual riding goals and overcoming issues that crop up along the way. Seat, leg, hand, and upper body position greatly affect the horse's way of going and the rider's ability to influence that. Learning to maintain good position with flexibility, balance, and in harmony with the horse's motion is an important part of lessons for riders at all levels. Through achieving greater control and independence in the use of the various parts of the riding body, riders will have an easier time learning to clearly apply the signals (aids) they wish to give the horse. Using the aids properly and teaching the horse to respond to those aids correctly, whether it be for circles and walk-trot transitions or half-passes and pirouettes, forms a large part of any lesson. Lessons may also focus on riding theory, preparing for a test or show situation, and working through behavioral issues, among other things.

Lessons are 45 minutes long, and riders are expected to have their horses tacked and warmed up prior to the start of the lesson time, unless the warm-up is intended to be part of the lesson. Other people are welcome to observe lessons at any time unless expressly denied by the rider or instructor. Riders may have lessons video taped and are encouraged to do so. Other riders are welcome to be in the arena during lessons, as long as they can watch out for the lesson rider and do not present a potential hazard. Riders should make sure to have extra time after the end of the lesson for cooling out their horses, especially in the winter.

Semi-Private Lessons:

Much the same as a private lesson, the semi-private allows two riders of reasonably similar skill to work together in a lesson. Some riders use this situation to build in more frequent breaks for themselves and their horses, as the instructor can alternate between instructing each rider. A rider may also find it helpful to see the issues brought up by his or her colleague. Semi-private lessons can be somewhat more efficient, as any theoretical discussion suffices for both riders at once. Riders may also elect to divide the hour lesson so that each rider has a specific amount of time to themselves. These times can be overlapped if the riders wish so that some portion is spent riding or discussing theory together and some time is spent apart.

Lunge Lesson:

In this situation, the horse is lunged by me (probably with side-reins) with the rider on its back so that the rider may concentrate on his or her seat and position without having to worry about controlling the horse. Strength and flexibility exercises form part of a lunge lesson, as well as exercises designed to promote independence of the hands, seat, and legs. Work is done with and without reins and stirrups at the walk, trot, and canter. Lunge lessons are an ideal way for less experienced riders to develop a solid foundation for their riding, but can also help the more experienced rider check the strength of their position and get away from bad habits. Not all horses are suitable for use in lunge lessons and I will want to lunge the horse with no rider to gauge its behavior before attempting a first lesson. Riders should bear in mind that even a seemingly placid horse can behave unpredictably on the lunge line and that they assume all risk. Riders may warm-up horses prior to a lunge lesson if they wish, but it is not necessary.

Training:

Horses are put into training for a variety of reasons. An owner may wish for a green horse to be brought to a particular level of training before they begin working with it themselves. Owners with mature horses may wish for them to be re-trained from a different discipline. Riders may find themselves unable to move their horses up to the next level without assistance, or that problems have arisen that they are unable to correct. Breeders and hobbyists may wish to own a horse that is trained and shown to a high level by a specialist. Whatever the reason, it is important for the owner and trainer to come to an agreement about the owner's goals, what the horse needs, and how best to fulfill these things.

Most important is for owners to decide how much they are realistically going to be able to do with the horse by themselves. How many days a week will they be able to work the horse? A horse needs exercise of some kind every day. Horses out in pasture can get by with being worked only a few times a week, but horses that spend most of their time in stalls and small paddocks ideally need some form of exercise every day, even it's just being walked and jogged for 20 minutes. Horses like routine, and days off are often more for us than for them!

Depending on the skill of the owner, it is necessary to consider how much his or her riding the horse may slow its training progress and whether this is significant to the owner. This is a complex balance between the horse's character and level of training, the abilities of the rider, and the goals set out for horse and rider. Any time that a horse in training is intended to be ridden by someone other than the trainer, it is a good idea to take lessons from the trainer, otherwise much of the benefit of the training may be quickly lost.

Even when owners want to leave all or most of the work to the trainer, it is still possible to be involved in the horse's training in other ways besides riding. Owners are always welcome to attend training sessions and are encouraged to ask questions, get the horse ready, warm up the horse on the lunge line or under saddle, and cool the horse out. Learning by observation can be one of the most powerful lessons.

A training ride typically lasts 30-40 minutes, depending on how quickly the horse meets the goals for that particular ride. I sometimes consider tacking and warming up to be part of the horse's training and do this myself, depending on the horse, or I may feel the horse is solid enough to leave these tasks to an assistant. Since part of training is conditioning the horse both mentally and physically to be able to do the tasks required of it, rides may seem repetitive on a day to day basis. A trainer must always gauge when a horse is confirmed enough in one set of exercises to begin introducing new ones. Sometimes switching activities for a day or two (e.g. jumping or hacking) may be beneficial to the training by getting the horse outside of its set pattern mentally and physically. I may also request that a session be video taped every now and then to monitor the horse's progress more objectively.

Lunging Sessions:

Some horses may need a period of work exclusively on the lunge line, whether for training purposes or for physical strengthening (which often go hand in hand). Young horses can particularly benefit from work on the lunge as it is an easy way to instill the basics of go, whoa, bending, and going on the bit. It also gives them a chance to build up the muscles they need to carry and balance themselves so that it is easier for them to carry the extra burden of a rider. The

same is true for a horse that has been out of work for an extended period or is being re-trained. Lunging may also be used to supplement work under the saddle. In any case, the entire session is no more than 30 minutes, with only 20 minutes of collected work on the lunge line because of the physical demands this places on the horse. Usually the horse will be walked on a long rein for 5 minutes, then trotted and cantered with side reins for 10 minutes in each direction, and then cooled out on a long rein for 5 minutes.

Individual versus monthly packages:

Riders looking for only occasional help or who wish to have flexible scheduling and the convenience of canceling with late notice may wish to pay for lessons individually. Substantial discounts are offered to riders who wish to commit to a regular schedule and are able to find alternate times for the occasional canceled lesson. If riders anticipate having to re-schedule weekly lessons frequently, they should most likely opt for individual lessons.

Traveling to stables:

I am a regular trainer/instructor at Chinnock Farm, a private boarding facility near Hudson, WI, where I work 4-5 days per week and have the bulk of my clients. Stalls are available for horses in training/lessons with me, and interested parties should inquire. I have limited time to travel to other stables, but am happy to try and accommodate outside clients when possible. Barn call fees do not apply to clients at Chinnock Farm, but because of the additional travel time and vehicle wear and tear involved in traveling around to other barns, it is necessary to charge a small fee per trip. When multiple riders can coordinate their ride times at the same location, travel fees are reduced or even waived.

Stables need to provide at least a 50'x100' arena with adequate footing and lighting, and minimal dust (TIP - if dust is a problem, water the arena before your lesson!). For trips to outdoor arenas, there must be no snow in the arena, temperatures must be above 40 degrees, and it cannot be raining (because of the unpredictability of weather, anyone with no access to a sheltered arena must take individual sessions). For sessions at indoor arenas, the arena must either be heated in the winter or the temperature must be above 20 degrees.

Showing:

Taking a horse to shows can provide goal markers to help riders and owners view their progress and their horse's progress more objectively. It can also be a fun and social experience, and has the added benefit of increasing a horse's value if it performs well. Judges comments can be helpful in pinpointing horse and rider strengths and weaknesses – this is particularly true in the case of schooling shows. Most shows close as early as a month before the show date, and dressage shows are not terribly numerous in Minnesota, so it is generally wise to plan ahead for which shows to enter in a season (which runs from April to October in Minnesota). It is also possible to travel around to other states for shows (particularly to the Chicago area where they are more numerous). Riders going to shows need to provide their own transportation, although it is often possible to share a spot in someone else's trailer. I do not offer horse transport, although I can recommend people who do.