



Mane Squeeze: The Incredible Therapy Horses of the Cowichan Therapeutic Riding Association



CTRA horses (from left to right) "Phats" "Tonka" "Pippa" and "Sage" during the 2013 Ride-a-Thon (photo credit: Colleen Hunt)

Most of us are well versed on guide dogs and many of us are familiar with the work of assistance animals. However, the role of the therapy horse tends to be less understood. This incredible animal serves a multifaceted and dynamic role in the therapeutic riding/equine therapy stable – enhancing the quality of life for hundreds of people in the course of its career.



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Although therapeutic horses come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and breeds, they tend to share some common characteristics. Most therapeutic riding (TR) horses fall between 14 hands (the size of a large pony) and 16 hands (the size of the average race horse). A suitable TR horse will typically fall on the “stocky” side, with a short-coupled confirmation. Because some riders can have low muscle tone or difficulty balancing, even gentle work can be taxing on the muscular-skeletal system of these animals. For this reason, a sturdy bearing is important for the long-term comfort and usability. TR horses do not need to be top performers, but must be sound and possess good, clean gaits in order to produce the type of “three-dimensional” movement (up/down, back/front, side/side) that is associated with therapeutic benefit.

Although certain breeds tend to be pre-disposed to therapy work, the demeanor, condition, training, and background of an individual horse plays a larger role in the selection process than breed type. The Cowichan Therapeutic Riding Association (CTRA) uses a number of Norwegian Fjord horses in the program (prized for their sturdy build, average size, versatility, and quiet temperament), but also is home to a number of breeds including draft-crosses and quarter horses.

Most of the therapy horses accepted into the CTRA program are “well-schooled” (experienced) in the common riding disciplines (dressage, jumping, western pleasure, etc.) and are of an age to have considerable “life experience” (trail riding, showing, extensive handling, etc.). The greatest commonality of horses engaged with therapeutic work is their connection to people. Whether the horse is used for riding or un-mounted therapeutic work, a great therapeutic horse demonstrates consistent compassion, patience, kindness, and enthusiasm for the job.

When a horse enters the CTRA program, it is taught an additional set of skills that help it to communicate with and assist participants with special needs. Examples of this training include learning to understand adaptive “aids” (for example a hand-held stick used instead of a leg command) or training to the “lift” (a mechanism that assists riders from wheelchairs to the saddle). Life in the CTRA program is highly regimented to enable the training of these animals. From the feed schedule to specific instructions for handling – the top-quality care these animals receive is specifically designed to support their ability to do this very important job.

CTRA receives horses for the program from a number of community sources. Some horses are donated or loaned to the program while others are purchased by the association (usually with the assistance of a grant). All candidate horses for the program undergo an assessment (or trial) period which can last several months. Because the job is so specific, and hinges on the horse’s affinity for the work, it is almost impossible to determine suitability without allowing the horse to fully integrate into the program. The CTRA herd is maintained through community support, and several individuals and groups in the community contribute funds directly as “horse sponsors.”

For more information on therapeutic horses, or if you would like to become involved as a participant, volunteer, or supporter, please contact CTRA at info@ctra.ca or 250-746-1028.





Gift Ideas at CTRA

Looking for that perfect gift?

At CTRA you can give while giving back. There are several ways you can support CTRA this holiday season and philanthropy is something that looks good on everyone!

Reserve a spot for our Spring Break Horse Camp!

CTRA is hosting a Spring Break Horse Camp for children of all abilities March 17th - 21st 2014. If you book before February 1 2014, you will save \$25 on the cost of this week-long camp. This is a great present for the child in your life!



Learn more:

<http://www.ctra.ca/program/horse-camps-at-ctra>

Give the gift of a horse sponsorship!

Partial horse sponsorships are available until the new year. For \$200 you can sponsor part of a therapy horse (full sponsorships are \$2500). CTRA will send a special letter and card to your loved one and their name will be displayed for 1 year on a plaque outside the selected therapy horse's stall. Giving the gift of care for one of these special animals is a great way to ring in the holidays!

Donate in your loved one's name!

CTRA is happy to send out a card acknowledging that a donation has been made on behalf of your loved one. Donations over \$25 are eligible for a tax receipt, and donations over \$100 will receive a brass acknowledgement plaque in our "hallway of friendship" (under your chosen name).

Load up a smile card!

Ask CTRA for one of our Thrifty Foods Smile Cards. You can pre-pay any amount on this card and give it as a gift card. 5% of what you load onto the card comes directly back to CTRA!

Silent Auction Table

Its not too late to check out our silent auction table and get your bid in before Christmas. You can call in or email your bid, and the table closes this Friday, December 20th @ 4pm.

<http://www.ctra.ca/silent-auction-table>

For the horsey folks

A ticket to the upcoming Jodine Carruthers "If Your Horse Could Talk" seminar (Jan 28th, \$30) is a great gift! (see below)

CTRA would also be happy to arrange for a gift certificate for our Used Tack Store. [Contact us](#) for details.

<http://www.ctra.ca/used-tack-store-and-free-store>



If Your Horse Could Talk:

CTRA hosts Equine Behaviour Specialist and Author Jodine Carruthers for a special educational opportunity



Jodine is a local equestrian expert who has dedicated her career to improving the lives of horses and their humans (photo courtesy harmonioushorsemanship.com)

Jodine Carruthers Seminar: If Your Horse Could Talk – Understanding Equine Behaviour Issues

Tues, January 28 2014

Tickets \$30

CTRA is very excited to once again host Equine Behaviour Specialist and Author Jodine Carruthers for an exciting educational opportunity. Jodine is a life-long horsewoman who grew up as an active “pony clubber” and competitor in the “A circuit” hunter/jumper world. She has since studied with the likes of Monty Roberts

(the famous “horse whisperer”) and Jane Holderness-Roddam (equestrian gold medalist and prolific equine author) and garnered a name for herself as an authority on horse psychology and inter-species communication. Jodine is the founder of [Harmonious Horsemanship](http://www.harmonioushorsemanship.com) and has published two books – “If Your Horse Could Talk” and “Don’t Just Face Your Fear, Embrace Your Fear.”

Jodine’s teachings focus on empowering people to better understand the unique partnership between horse and human. Jodine’s background in neuroscience and human dynamics frame her lessons on understanding horse equine body language, facilitating horse-human dialogue, overcoming fear issues, and healing equine trauma.

Jodine’s talk will take place on Tuesday January 28th 2014 at the CTRA facility (Doors at 6:00pm, finish 8:30pm). The focus of this session will be on providing insight and inspiration for anyone who has ever felt confused or frustrated by their horse’s behavior. “If Your Horse Could Talk” will cover the six reasons behind undesirable behavior; the importance of understanding the root of the problem; the difference between undesirable behavior and equine trauma; and lasting solutions over quick fixes.

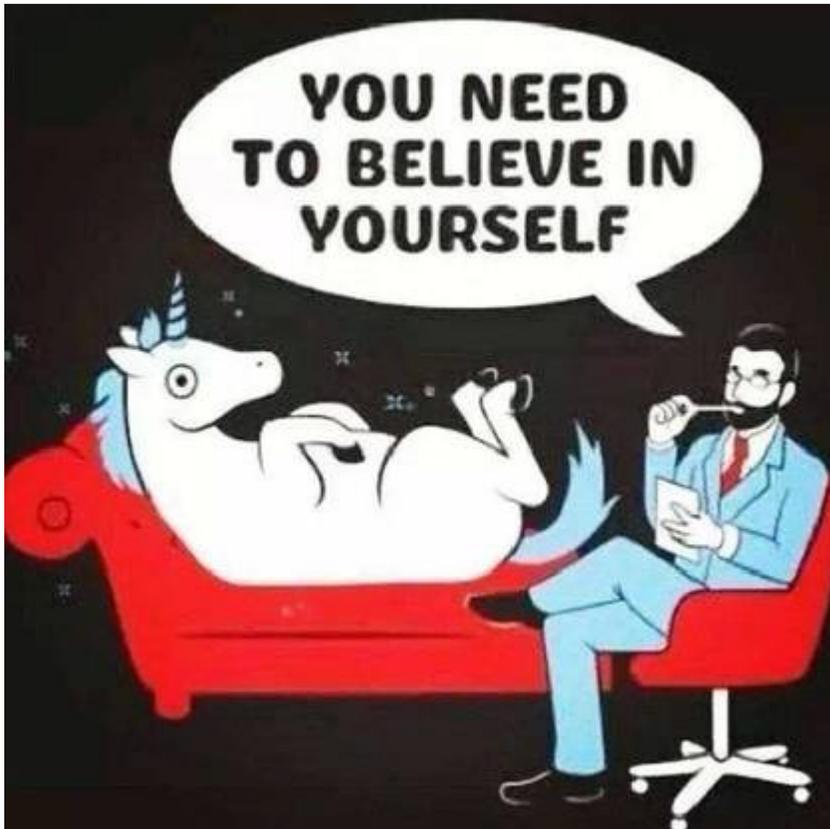
Keeping with her goal to give back to non-profit organizations that assist humans through horses, Jodine will be donating 50% of the ticket sale proceeds from this event to CTRA. Tickets are \$30 and seating is limited.

This seminar is a great gift for the horse person in your life (or maybe this is the gift you give yourself/your horse). To reserve your spot, please contact Anne at anne@ctra.ca or call 250-746-1028.

Event poster [here](#)



For manure and giggles:



From all of us at CTRA we wish you (and yours) a safe, happy holiday season and all the very best for 2014!