

What's New At The Oldest Show In The U.S.

Local Day Spread Over The Week, Free Admission And Fun For Everyone

By Emily Houston

A Horse Times Interview With Emily Day, Director of the 2020 Upperville Horse Show

Emily Day took the reins as the Director of the Upperville Horse Show this year, in a new position created to help keep all the moving parts of putting on such a large and prestigious show in gear. Day is a lifelong horseperson who grew up fox hunting, doing Pony Club, breaking and riding ponies at her grandmother's Farnley Farm, training race horses for 30 years with her husband Jimmy Day, while continuing to fox hunt

PHOTO COURTESY: VALERIE DURBON



Emily Day

and show "racetrack remakes" in the jumper and hunter divisions.

Q: *Why did you want to get involved in running this show?*

A: Upperville has always been a special show for me because both competing and spectating were always such a big deal for me and my family. As kids, if we got to show there, it was a huge thing. I've competed some jumpers at the show, but never made it to a very high level because the horses were sold before I got there. But one thing I especially love about the show is that there is something for everybody in terms of opportunities to compete.

Another thing about Upperville that's special to me is the hometown, intimate feel of it. At the show, you see so many people from our area who are involved in all types of horse sports, whether it be fox hunting, steeple chasing, pony breeding... It makes you realize we are all one big community. A lot of the people who work on the show have been at it a long time, and are very emotionally attached to the show for the same reasons I am.

Q: *The show has always, pretty much since anyone can remember, been known for its "Local Day," with classes specifically designed for local riders. Tell us about what you are doing differently with those this year.*

A: We've spread the "local classes" out over the week, in order to help everything run smoothly in our busy hunter rings, and finish before the sun goes down. By local classes, I mean those that have a restriction regarding the residency of the owner and/or rider, or where the horse was bred. We've also added additional criteria for the hunter classes labelled as "local." Not only do horses eligible for those classes have to be owned (and in some cases ridden) by residents of counties within a 60-mile radius of the show, they must also have been stabled within that radius for three consecutive months since 6/8/19. The intention is to make these classes truly local. We've also taken away the grounds fee for some of the Exhibition and Breeding classes, to make it more affordable for local people to haul in to show.

In addition to those classes, there are plenty of other opportunities for local riders to compete. We have our famous

Lead Line classes, walk-trot for slightly older kids, various classes for Thoroughbred (both raced and unraced), the Family Class, side saddle classes (which tend to attract local riders), the Founders Cup... Not to mention that in the jumpers we have a huge range of jump heights, and have added .85 meter classes to our lineup this year as well. It's a chance to get in the same rings our top national and international riders compete in, jump the same jumps, and win a ribbon that says "Upperville Colt & Horse Show" on it!

Q: *Certainly spectators are a big part of the equation as well....*

A: Yes, and the big news this year is that we have a benefactor who has enabled us to make admission to the show completely free! We've developed some really fun things for kids to do at the show – Art Under The Oaks (a tent on the Hunter Side where various projects can be created) and petting zoo on the Jumper Side. We're also adding picnic tables on the Hunter Side. For the less-than-horse-crazy family members, there is a car show too.

But the big thing for all of us is that this show is a chance to meander right up to the rail and find yourself watching some of the greats of our sport competing. You might even find yourself standing next to McLain Ward, Laura Chapot, Tori Colvin, or Joe Fargis, and you could even say hello! They are friendly people! This is an amazing opportunity to be exposed to the very highest level of competition – we are an FEI 4-star international event. We are incredibly fortunate to have this right in our own backyard.

Virginia is such a breeding ground for amazing horse people. That means that the show is also a "hometown" show for many of the top riders as well. They may travel the country and the world competing now, but they got their start here – people like Katie Monahan Prudent, Joe Fargis and Allison Robitaille, who all have their "home farms" right here in Virginia, and showed here as kids. Laura Kraut, a top international competitor piloted a pony to the Medium Pony Hunter championship at the show in 1978.

Joe Fargis, President of the show this year, first competed here in 1960 in the Large Pony Hunters, and has been riding and coaching here pretty much every year since. These are just a few examples of how deeply the history of the show runs in today's local horse community.

Q: *This is the show's 167th year, to be held at the same location since its inception in 1853. Congratulations on doing your part to ensure that this year's show takes its place in the long history of an iconic event.*

A: It is a special place. The grounds are breathtakingly beautiful, and our community works hard to maintain the venue and its traditions. The huge old trees are supported by our tree committee and a fund to maintain them. Our old grandstand, and in fact all of the permanent structures on the grounds, are painted a distinctive green color, a requirement in the covenants on the property, which is in conservation easement. Preserving our heritage, while at the same time making the changes we feel will add to the show's vitality, are our mission.



Hunter riders at Upperville get to compete among the show's famous stately oak trees.

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