

Summer Camp Memories

Pony Club Summer Programs Continue And Enhance The Curriculum

By Dawn Bellinger



PHOTOS COURTESY: CWPC

The Casanova-Warrenton Pony Club summer campers, volunteers and instructors take a break from their busy week to pose for a group shot.

They say that memories are made from experiences that are different from the every day. If that is true, then no better experience can be made than from a summer camp!

My daughter and I both grew up going to Pony Club summer camp, of course separated by 30 years but essentially the same experience. She's now almost 30 herself but Pony Club summer camp has remained largely unchanged. Why? The needs of the animal and the tenants of Pony Club haven't changed.

Summer camp in Pony Club offers our members the opportunity to learn how to provide complete care and feeding to their horse or pony as well as progress their individual mounted ability. Members bring a horse or pony (owned, leased or borrowed) to the camp's barn, set up their stall and shared tack room, and prepare to ride at least twice a day. Pony Club camps are usually taught by a number of upper level members, visiting instructors, and occasionally National Examiners.

Some camps are divided by certification level between the less experienced members (designated as D's) and the upper level members (designated as C's and above), depending on the size of the organizing club or

region. But all Pony Club camps teach the same subjects through a strict curriculum of mounted and unmounted "subjects" or disciplines. Camp is also a perfect opportunity for our members to try new disciplines and enjoy the benefits of getting together with a group of like-minded friends.

Education begins the minute the camper arrives and doesn't stop until they drive away. A typical camp day begins with everyone feeding his or her own horse or pony. When? At a sufficiently early hour that the animal will have digested breakfast enough for a morning lesson. What? Hay (a roughage) and fresh water first, always. Then, grain (a concentrate) and supplements. All members learn about the digestive system of the animal so that they can understand the "Why" and thus become better partners.

A flurry of morning chores come next. Wheelbarrows, pitchforks and muck buckets are shared as campers help each other clean stalls. Each horse or pony has unique needs in the morning. Some are hand walked, some need a little grass, some have stall wraps removed while others need wound care. All require grooming. And all tasks take place under the watchful eye of knowledgeable adults and upper level members.

continued on p. 53



Two Pony Club campers enjoy an afternoon nuzzle.

PC Camp.....from p. 51

Camp is first and foremost an opportunity for education in all things equine.

Finally, the barns empty as the first mounted lessons of the day begin. Each day and each camp may have a different mounted focus with campers placed in lessons according to ability.

Most days allow for two mounted lessons but never jumping twice in the same day as that would not be good for the animal. Again, always teaching, the camper learns not just the rule but the reason; the impact of

jumping on the animal's legs is strenuous. Mounted lessons can include dressage, show jumping, cross-country, games, and/or polocrosse.

After riding, campers make sure their horses and ponies are tucked into their stalls clean and fed before they look to their own comfort; this is one of the foundations of Pony Club. Camp also provides ample opportunity for unmounted lessons, again by ability: bandaging, grooming, clipping, colors, markings, breeds, care of tack, equine nutrition, poisonous plants, systems of the animal, rider fitness, and more.

But the mounted and unmounted curriculum of Pony Club doesn't change for summer camp. It's the same curriculum used throughout the year. What's different is the comradery, leadership, teamwork, and sportsmanship that develops quickly during the days and nights spent together caring for the animals. The horse is the vehicle for the education. That hasn't changed since the origin of Pony Club.

You may join Pony Club so you can attend one of our summer camps. Email VRPCmembership@gmail.com and let our Membership Coordinator help you find a local club or center that's a right fit for you. You can also find more information about membership on page 50 in this issue of Horse Times or on our website.



Pony Club camps teach ALL aspects of horse care, and campers find it is all fun.