



The Price Of Perfection

Is it the show circuit or the type of teenager who chooses competitive riding? Either way, coming of age at the in-gate can be synonymous with stress.

BY MOLLIE BAILEY

When Shelley Campf's seatmate on an airplane starts making polite conversation and asks what she does for a living, Campf doesn't mention horses.

"I say I work with teenage girls," said Campf, who runs Oz Inc. in Canby, Ore. "Training horses, yes, that's what the business is. But a huge responsibility for that is helping to be a parent in [my students'] lives that's not a parent."

Riding competitively imparts a long list of life lessons and practical skills, teaching responsibility, organization, time management, compassion, composure, independence, self-actualization and fortitude, among others. But teenage riders face different pressures than those who have already hit 18 or are still in jodhpurs, whether they're trying to qualify for a regional championship or win a national final.

"There's a small window for the very goal-oriented kids to get a tremendous amount accomplished," said Stacia Klein Madden, who teaches many nationally competitive teenagers at her Beacon Hill Stable in Colts Neck, N.J. "There are [Adequan/FEI North American Junior and Young Riders Championships] and team competitions in Europe and [equitation] finals and indoors and specialty classes like the [George Morris Excellence In Equitation (Fla.)] and Kathy Scholl Equitation Classic [N.Y.]. There are a lot of short-term goals on the kids' plates. You're trying to do that and juggle your school, getting into college, trying to maintain

your friendships and your other sports activities. It's a lot."

While most riders remember their junior days as a positive time, they don't forget the stress. And for some it manifests itself in unhealthy behaviors or real problems.

"Being a teenager is a confusing time, and in a sport that requires a tremendous amount of funding it's even more complex," said Campf. "I think it's hardest for the kid who rides regionally and wishes she could ride at Heritage Farm.

"There's the kid who thinks, 'The only reason she's better than me is because she's richer,'" she continued. "There's the kid who says, 'I don't know why they hate me,' and the other kids are jealous because her dad bought her three horses, and they just have one. And there's an awful lot in between. It's a cliché, but I always say, there will always be someone richer, skinnier or more successful than you. It's about seeing how to fit into this world knowing this."

