

Make Way for the Horse

Marital Bliss is Possible with a Non-Riding Spouse.

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We all know that horses demand much of our time, attention and money, so a horse can be a sticking point in a marriage with a non-riding spouse. It's such a common issue: one person rides and the other does not, so there's often a power struggle. But sports psychologist and dressage rider Timmie Pollock says there are ways to have a happy horse life and a happy marriage.

"There are two categories of the non-horsey spouse," Pollock says. "There's the supportive spouse who wants you to enjoy your sport and be happy, and there's a non-supportive spouse who resents the horse and wants you to give it up. A healthy marriage is made up of people who say, 'it's not my interest but let's find a way to work it out to make you happy.'"

Strategies for Harmony

Many riders fall into the trap of thinking they can convince their spouses that riding is the best thing since the invention of the wheel. A nice relaxing two-hour trail ride is just the ticket. However, this plan often backfires. Making someone without riding skills sit on a strange, uncomfortable and seemingly uncontrollable animal for an extended period of time may be received as cruel and unusual punishment. "The spouse has had a terrible time, and now thinks, 'I don't know what he/she sees in this,'" Pollock says. "A good marriage doesn't mean you do everything together. It's not realistic to think you can drag your spouse along with you in everything you do. It's not necessary for [your spouse] to like everything you like. If he [or she] offers to try it then great, if he [or she] decides no, then that's OK too."

On the other hand, your spouse may take to riding. Start him or her off on the right foot. Buy your spouse a package of lessons with a trainer who has safe, reliable school horses. Maybe your spouse decides riding isn't for him or her but would still like to be included in your horse life. "He or she can come watch you at horse shows," Pollock says. "If [your spouse] wants to be involved further, then show him [or her] how to groom. My husband does not ride, but he handles horses beautifully. He really prides himself in it. Guys love to drive a truck and trailer, and often it's a relief to relax and let someone else drive you to the show." Don't forget to show your gratitude and respect your spouse's interests as well. If they have something they want you to participate in, then give it a try.

Horses can take up a lot of time, as we all know, but the solution is to find a balance. "Your marriage needs attention too," Pollock says. "I always tell people that there are three lives in a marriage. There's the life of the marriage and the lives of both individuals. You can't ignore any of those—[they] all need attention." There is no right or wrong when deciding how much time you'll spend on each, just as long as both of you are in agreement. One solution is to coordinate your time so that when you're riding, your spouse is doing his or her thing, and then you can return home and spend time together.

The money issue can also be a problem. Horses cost money, and ideally you don't want to hide anything from your spouse. "The problem often comes if the husband is the major contributor financially," Pollock says. "If he's not happy with the horses, sometimes he'll try to [be controlling] by withholding funds. I see that a lot. It's a little easier if you have your own income, but you need to discuss it and be open about it. Figure out a budget and stick to it. Also, be reasonable in your spending. Are you willing to sacrifice your family's financial future for your horse habit? One solution is to get a part-time job that helps pay the bills."

With compromise and consideration on both sides, you can have harmony both in the barn and at home.

Read on for more advice on resolving conflicts with a non-horsey partner.