

Interscholastic Equestrian Association Launches Saddle Seat Riding Program

The IEA provides competition opportunities for middle and high school students in western, hunt seat, and now saddle seat.

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The Interscholastic Equestrian Association (IEA) has officially announced that saddle seat is approved as an emerging discipline of IEA, and teams are starting to form all over the United States.

Hundreds of teams and thousands of members have enjoyed participating in IEA hunt seat and western competitions for the past 8 years, but this will be the first year for the saddle seat offerings.

The mission of IEA is to introduce students in private and public middle and secondary schools (primarily ages 11 through 19) to equestrian sports, to develop understanding and appreciation of equestrian sports through organized student competitions, to provide students with organized competitive events and to provide additional equine educational opportunities. Through the IEA, students may also have the opportunity to earn scholarships towards their college education.

To form a team, "You need at least 3 students for an upper school or middle school team. Teams can form within your own barn or you can help promote saddle seat outside of your barn by contacting local schools. The IEA has everything spelled out for you, and it's a great way to expand riding opportunities" says IEA Saddle Seat Coordinator Lark R. Henry.

Not only will the IEA help promote the growth of saddle seat riding around the country, but it will also bring a new format for youths to participate in saddle seat competitions. "This is going to bring saddle seat to a whole new level by making it affordable. It will open a new outlet by allowing riders to get back into showing again without spending a fortune." Says Bille Rae Graham, of Royal Wind Farm in West Virginia. Graham also coaches an IEA hunt seat team and is the current coach for Marshall University Equestrian Team in Huntington, West Virginia. Graham concludes "This will also help riders to be seen by college recruiters."

Graham will be forming her own IEA saddle seat team and is happy to assist or answer any question regarding organizing teams throughout Zone 3 (Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina) and Zone 5 (Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan). Bille Rae Graham can be reached by email at raverajax@aol.com, or by phone (304) 208-3130.

In this first, formative year, IEA memberships will be discounted for saddle seat teams and riders. The IEA structure and format will extend to saddle seat competitions held from September through April, and top point earners will receive national awards, prizes and scholarships.

For more information about IEA, visit the IEA website, www.rideiea.com. More information regarding saddle seat will be posted again in early August.