

The Conflict of a Non-Horsey Family

Riders fall into four general categories when it comes to maintaining relationships with non-equestrians.

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There's a narrative in the modern American horse world that has become something of a trope. The most common example is probably the horse-loving woman who has to deal with the scorn of the husband who doesn't understand horses and resents the amount of time she spends with them. We've certainly contributed to this narrative here at Horse Illustrated over the years, but it's always seemed a little outdated to me. Financially, sure. I can see where a horse owner racking up household debt in order to buy pricey tack or travel to clinics could lead to conflicts, but that seems like just one example of the kind of strife that happens in any relationship where finances are shared. But I wondered if there were really a lot of people whose family members resented the amount of time and energy they gave to their horses, so we asked our Facebook community.

It turns out this situation is pretty common, and it isn't just the equestrian wife/non-horsey husband situation. While conflicts between spouses/significant others are the most common, the horse lovers at the center are both men and women, and parents, children, and even distant relatives are the ones providing the scorn. Stock photo guy secretly resents stock photo horse.

How do people deal with it? Based on the responses we got, I think you can generalize most situations into four different categories. 1. Unresolved Problems

This group related most to the scenario, because they were living it and it wasn't going well. Several people responded that yes, they do have family members who get upset, and it caused fights. They hadn't found a resolution, so they kept going to the barn and their family members kept being angry about it. My oversimplistic first reaction to that is, of course, "get rid of that person," and many people posted responses along those lines. But of course, relationships aren't that black-and-white, and in the case where it's not your partner but your kids who resent the horses, you can't very well just disown them.

I didn't see any responses from people who said that they did give up horses or reduce the amount of time they spend at the barn because of a family member's disapproval, which is somewhat reassuring. On the other hand, I'm sure those people are out there, and it could be just that they're not following horse-related Facebook pages and therefore weren't around to weigh in. 2. If You Can't Beat 'Em...

There were several cases where someone had paired off with another horse person, which avoids the whole problem in the first place, but there were an impressive number of people who managed to convince their partner or kids to join them. This is a nice solution because not only does it eliminate the conflict and give you more time with your family, but it also benefits your family members by getting them involved in the rewarding world of horses and riding.

Of course, this doesn't sound great to everyone. Maybe you need your barn time to be yours and you don't want your family tagging along on every ride. Maybe you want to make sure you and your partner maintain some degree of separate lives and identities. I fall firmly into this camp, which is why the solid showing from the next group seemed like a positive thing to me. 3. Absence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder

You have horses. Your husband/wife/boyfriend/girlfriend has knitting/football/fishing/amateur astrophysics. If one of you has a time-consuming hobby and the other is waiting at home while dinner gets cold, you have a problem. If you both have time-consuming hobbies, you probably won't notice that the other is spending so much time on theirs, because you're too busy with yours. You're probably both going to have to be okay with having a grilled cheese for dinner for the fourth night in a row, too, unless one of you has the time-consuming hobby of cooking, in which case, you both win big.

The downside is that you can't count on this person to come cheer you on at your next show, because he or she is probably busy with his or her own thing. On the other hand, that brings up a part of this trope that has always boggled my mind. There's this idea that the husband (usually) is going to get up at 4:30 a.m. on a Saturday and spend the weekend at a horse show or equine expo or whatever. What is that? If my better half tried to convince me to get up before dawn to

travel to some activity that held no interest for me every other weekend through the summer, you bet I'd resent it. So I don't expect that from him. 4. Avoid the Problem

Humans, like horses, are gregarious by nature. But exceptions to this abound. A few people responded by saying they didn't have conflicts because they're single. Now, no one specifically said that they preferred to be single so they could spend all their time at the barn with no one to hassle them about it. It's entirely possible they were single because they hadn't managed to find someone to put up with the equestrian lifestyle. But there are certainly people out there who are perfectly content to remain single and childless so that they can fulfill their own dreams, and I say props to those people for not conforming to the whole pair-off-and-make-a-family thing.

People are complicated. Relationships are complicated. There's never going to be a one-size-fits-all solution to the non-horsey family question. But I think it's fair to say that no matter where you stand, you're not alone. There's a rider out there dealing with something similar.

Feel free to share your experiences in the comments.

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