

Riding Instructor

Official Publication
of The American Riding
Instructors Association

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Peer Profile
Mary Hamilton
Corcoran, Minnesota

**Surprise! A Pilot's Tool Can
Help Riding Instructors**
by Doug Emerson

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Celebrating 32 Years Serving the Nation's Riding Instructors

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Cover photo: Mary Hamilton by Shelley Paulson www.shelleypaulson.com. **Above:** Getting used to noisy helicopters is just part of the job.



Top Getting ready to go to work. **Above** Minneapolis Police Graduation. A field trip day to downtown Minneapolis after completing the six-week mounted police school.

Mary Hamilton

Corcoran, Minnesota

RI *Why did you decide to become a riding instructor?*

MH No glamour story here. I was a member of the mounted police unit for one year. Essentially I was a rookie. During a basic mounted police school, a student was unseated in a field training exercise. His horse, Dusty, bolted. Our instructor, Johnny Parker, galloped after the loose horse to catch him. His horse, Rocky, slipped and fell. Johnny was ejected, breaking his clavicle and ribs.

Our mounted unit sergeant, Ed Rudenberg, called me into his office that day and said, "Mary, you are the instructor now." While I had a degree in secondary education and had grown up on a farm with horses, that was the extent of my riding instructing experience.

Teaching the six-week mounted police school that spring was humbling, especially when students asked "Why" questions and I didn't have a good answer. This first class highlighted what I didn't know, as teaching often does. Consequently, I challenged myself to learn more and become a better instructor, so my students would become better riders.

RI *How long have you been teaching?*

MH I have been teaching mounted police since that fateful day in 1990 when I was appointed instructor. Initially, I only trained our department's officers and horses. Several years later I started teaching mounted police clinics to multiple police and posse groups. My goal was to improve the quality of mounted police training, network, and share experiences with other agencies.

In 2012, I retired from my department and began training mounted police departments through my company, Riders Elite Academy (www.riderselite.com). I also train civilian riders who have lost their confidence through a traumatic riding event and people who just want a low-stress, >



A Morgan horse breeder in Wisconsin working with a young horse during a Confidence Building Clinic, using mounted police techniques to de-spook horses.

fun way to strengthen the connection with their horse.

RI *What is your background as a rider, horse owner, etc.?*

MH I grew up on the family farm in Wisconsin, where my grandfather and father trained and used horses in the lumber camps to harvest wood.

I have a five-year-old Lusitano named "Florencio" who I am training in dressage.

I am a generalist in terms of horse enthusiasm. I enjoy trail riding, mounted orienteering, polo cross, mounted drill, obstacle training, and most everything involving horses.

RI *When and why did you become ARIA certified?*

MH In 2001 in Florida I became a certified ARIA instructor. I had long felt the credentials of a mounted police instructor needed to be held to a higher standard than, "You have been here awhile, now you are an instructor." ARIA tests knowledge both in your specific field and general horse training. It validates your skills independent of the police agency.

Both the convention and the magazine are bountiful sources of information on how to improve riding instruction tech-

niques. So often we are held in our own local information bubble. ARIA provides outside sources of new information and individuals you can ask, "How do you do this?"

In addition, as a police officer and Emergency Medical Technician, I've responded to numerous medical emergencies. As a result, I have seen some horrific horse/human accidents. ARIA's commitment to safety greatly attracted me to the program. Any safety practices we can use to prevent potential accidents are priceless.

RI *How has certification affected your business?*

MH ARIA certification provides a professional validation that instructors are legitimately knowledgeable about safety and general horse information, as well as their specialty. It's a national organization where potential clients can verify my qualifications independent of my website, or testimonials from other police departments. It has also reduced my insurance premiums!

RI *What other aspects of the horse business are you in?*

MH I also train civilian riders in confidence building through de-spooking clinics. About 10 years ago I realized there were a number of people who experienced some

fear about riding. They have lost confidence through a traumatic riding event or perhaps they have a new horse that is reactive to outside stimuli or maybe they have just gotten older and realized they "break" not "bounce." I thought if I can teach a horse to be calm as a helicopter lands beside it, I can help people have a braver horse and a less fearful experience.

In short, we develop a partnership between horse and rider to build confidence. Our motto is *No Fear=Riding Fun. Train with Corporal Mary Hamilton to help your horse become as calm as a police horse.*

We begin with ground work exercises to gain the horse's focus and attention. Obstacles are then presented in manageable and positive techniques, building confidence in both horse and rider.

Once the obstacles have been mastered on the ground, we ride cavalry drill maneuvers to teach the riders to relax. We then ride over the obstacles.

No one can completely "bombproof" a horse, but, we can teach riders the process to work through anything new that might occur. Once the horse and rider learn the process, they both know what to expect. This greatly reduces fear of "what's going to happen next."

RI *What are your hobbies and interests outside of the barn?*

MH I love the outdoors. The north shore of Lake Superior is a favorite vacation spot. Albuquerque, New Mexico is another for hiking and biking.

RI *What is your biggest success?*

MH My most rewarding success stories are from law enforcement departments that contract with me to review safety protocols and training methods after an officer and/or horse has been injured. By implementing safety protocols, such as mandatory helmet usage and better quality horsemanship training, these departments learn to prevent accidents and avoid being eliminated because of liability issues.

It is also rewarding to see a very fearful person come to my confidence-building



Smoke training is just part of the job.

clinics and find success with his or her horse. There is always that one student who just blooms when he or she understands the training. Their confidence soars as their fear ebbs.

RI *What words of wisdom would you share with new instructors?*

MH There is a lot to learn. Don't get cocky and think you know it all.

Don't think because someone does something different than you do, that he or she is wrong. Be "open-minded."

Never stop learning.

RI *If you had to do it all over again, what would you do differently?*

MH I would listen more carefully to what the hearts of people and horses were saying.

RI *What are your future goals?*

MH I am marketing an affordable new mobile records management system for mounted police and posse groups. Simple to use through mobile phone or tablet, this one-click system documents training, horse care, the police horse evaluation process, and more. All those messy, cumbersome paper documents are gone. Everything is available on-line, providing a professional format for records.

Winters will now find us in Lake Havasu, Arizona. Consequently, we hope to expand our training programs in Arizona and California. **R**

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