

My kingdom for a horse!

tions in Oakland County can ride on Saturday mornings or during the week at Ray's Ranch, 7571 Walnut Lake, West Bloomfield. Formerly called Shirwen Stables, Ray's offers special rates to groups of 20 or more.

"We have horses for all types of riders, beginner to advanced," noted Shirley Brown. "Sometimes we send out someone with the newer riders to show them where the trails are."

The ranch consists of 640 acres, including a picnic area and playground equipment. It charges \$5 an hour on Saturday, Sunday and holidays and \$4 during the week. Ponies can be rented for the same price. Hay rides along ranch trails are also available.

"You meet all kinds of people in this business," said Ms. Brown. "Sometimes you have to teach people how to treat a horse. They see too much TV and don't know a horse can only run for so long."

Sunday morning, she said, is the best time to come if you don't want to wait for a horse.

To ride at the ranch, take W. Maple west to Haggerty and turn north to the first road on the right, Walnut Lake Road. Turn right to Ray's.

Pat Wagenti of Hillcrest Stables Inc., Novi, finds that early morning is the best time for those who prefer to get a horse right away.

The stables rent horses on weekends until school is out. Then they are open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. every day but Monday.

"To ride, you have to be 12 so your

feet are long enough to reach the stirrups," said Mrs. Wagenti, adding that she loves all horses and other animals.

Her customers are almost equally divided between teenagers and adults.

What brings them out?

"It's the feeling of having a large animal under you that you can control with reins," she said.

Hillcrest may be reached by driving west on Eight Mile to Haggerty and turning north to Nine Mile. Go west on Nine Mile to the stables.

Other area stables which rent horses to the public are:

- Double D Ranch, 53656 Ten Mile, South Lyon

- Green Acres Ranch and Riding Stables, 52222 Ten Mile, South Lyon.

- Willowbrook Stables, 47430 Ten Mile, Novi

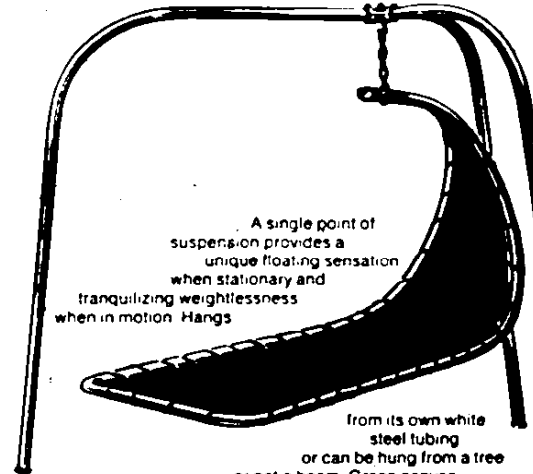
- Bald Mountain Riding Stable, 3085 S. Lapeer, Pontiac.

The continued popularity of horseback riding supports a number of riding apparel stores. Most of them are similar to Elliott's Saddlery, 217 Main in Plymouth, and Arizona Saddlery in Birmingham, Utica and Rochester. They feature boots, jeans, western shirts and hats for those who want to look the part while cantering along the trail.

Scott Colburn's Saddlery, 33305 Grand River, Farmington, and The Horseman Inc., 4316 N. Woodward, Royal Oak, also specialize in equestrian clothing.

—SHERRY KAHAN

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