

Oakland Leads The Horse Explosion

Affluence, Suburban Growth Make It Family Fun

By MARTHA MAHAN

Michigan's horse population is expected to more than double by 1985 as more and more families buy horses for pleasure riding and for showing. And Oakland County is leading the boom.

Oakland now counts more than 12,800 mounts, and the number is "growing fantastically," according to Bill Muller of the Cooperative Extension Service.

More leisure time and an emphasis on family togetherness also are seen as encouraging the interest in horsemanship.

"There's an appreciation of beauty, too," Muller said. "The horse is a noble animal. Folks look at their nice home in the country and decide that a fence and paddock really will set it off."

Country living also brings riders close to where feed is produced, Muller pointed out, and southern Oakland County is a surplus feed area.

"Horse associations haven't been idle, either," he said. "They've been out promoting their own breeds and competing at horse shows."

A recent five-meeting in-depth seminar sponsored by the extension service had an average attendance of 200 horse enthusiasts, Muller said.

A hurried two-day survey taken about a year ago when an illness was sweeping the horse population gave this count in the surrounding area:

Farmington, 1,200 horses; Southfield, 300; Novi, more than 900; Troy, 250; Bloomfield, 150, and West Bloomfield, 600.

Because the count was taken so rapidly, Muller figures it touched only about 50 per cent of the actual figure.



ROSE MARY VAN METER takes off for a canter from the Wilbur Steinkamp boarding stable on Powers Road in Farmington Hills. (Evert photo)

Previous Department of Agriculture censuses primarily covered farms, Muller said, and no full count ever had been attempted before last year's hurried effort.

Outside of banning interference with traffic, few if any communities place restrictions on horseback riding. The Livonia City Council back in 1967 considered prohibiting riding on mile and half-mile roads and concrete paved streets, but tabled the proposal.

Police departments describe their biggest problem as having to round up horses which break out and run loose.

Affluence is nearly a requisite to the horse as a hobby. Besides the animal's cost, gear and upkeep run high.

Walter Carroll, who has bred Justin Morgans for the past 22 years at his farm on Nine Mile between Drake and Halstead, in Farmington, gives this rundown on costs:

• Board \$30 to \$100 per month and self-feeding about \$25 to \$30 monthly;

• Veterinary charges about \$30, exclusive of illness, to immunize, worm twice a year and float (file) teeth.

• Resetting (trimming) hooves every six weeks to

two months at a cost of \$12 to \$15 and reshoeing every six months at a charge of \$12 to \$22.

The average saddle costs \$75 to \$400, Carroll said. A plain work harness comes to about \$150 and a fine harness about \$450.

Halters run \$10 and bridles from \$15 to \$50. Cost of the horse itself can be anywhere from \$150 to the thousands.

A not especially horse-minded family giving into a kid's yen for a mount likely will spend about \$250, Carroll estimated.

But let the kid become expert and enthused, and that family is "hooked."

"A child will outgrow that horse very soon and, as his ability grows and his interest in competing, the family is almost forced to buy a horse of better quality," said Mrs. Charles (Skip) Boyer, who operates a boarding farm in Novi.

From horses costing \$500 to \$1,000, the enthusiast may go to a well-trained Morgan at \$2,000 to \$5,000, an Arabian "even higher" in cost or a saddle bred "even more."

Older kids generally are satisfied with a purebred quarter horse costing \$1,000 and up.

Mrs. Boyer, who devotes much of her time to young riders, said the hobby attracts "a large number of kids up through age 14."

"Then they drop out and come back when they're about 20," she said.

"The Morgan Club is getting a real large number up to age 30, and more and more are becoming interested," she said. "The 30 and under mostly are riders and the over 30 breeders," she said.

Interest is spurred through competition.

So-called "pony farms" for young riders conduct equitation contests where entrants are judged on their riding

ability and skill in handling the horse.

Older competition includes riding ability, a horse's conformation to breed, performance, game contests and timed events.

"We went to a horse show at Ortonville a couple of weeks ago, and there were well over 500 persons there," Mrs. Boyer said. "And that was just a little show."

"Until we got into it, I never would have believed the size of the horse industry and the impact it must have on the economy," Mrs. Boyer said.

"Everywhere you go, you can always find a horse show somewhere nearby."

Apprentice Information Available

An informational program entitled "All About Apprenticeship" has been scheduled by Schoolcraft College for 6 p.m. on Thursday, Aug. 2.

The hour-long program will be conducted by Richard G. Holmes, director of technology, Ronald J. Monfette, past director of apprenticeship for the college will be the main speaker.

It is for employers, employees and returning veterans who have an interest in the industrial apprenticeship program offered by Schoolcraft.

Schoolcraft has about 350 apprentices enrolled in its related instruction program. The college serves over 300 design, manufacturing and other service-oriented companies, 120 of which are located within the college district. Related instruction is offered in 23 different occupational trades.

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