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Hold Your Horses

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Perhaps the man in question does like to see you widen your eyes as you listen in rapt wonder whilst he expands like a rigg in high wind explaining the tricks and intricacies of his favorite sport. However, some direct contact with his pet interest, if ever so slight, gives a foothold to your end of the conversation and encourages him to talk more freely.

Every city has its athletic organizations bound together by the love of talking shop. If an average woman were to listen in on one of these sessions, the gibberish would no doubt be a matter of so much Greek. It would be a revelation to hear the men who we thought spoke our language talking in such terms as: “hairpinned on for the jump,” or “tossed a split on the first throw.”

If you desire a conversational knowledge of riding, you may gain valuable information from campus sportsmen who modestly claim only an amateur’s authority, but whose experience is readily recognized.

You may learn about riding from Paul “Red” Strickland, who has ridden since the age of five. “You have to fall off a horse to learn to lose your equilibrium gracefully,” Red advised from his wealth of personal experience, “but every rider gets it in the neck sometime.”

A horse’s “points” are the most important considerations upon which he is judged: head, nose, ears, etc. The withers is the built up section across the shoulders, which, if well developed, marks a good animal. Sometimes an inferior horse has such beauty defects as “fiddle faced,” hocked, ring-boned or sway-backed.

A horse has various gaits. First is the walk which is self explanatory. The trot is the form in which the legs move in diagonal pairs. In a fast trot all four feet are off the ground twice during each stride. Posting to the trot is the technique of adjusting the rider’s rhythm to the horse’s.

A gallop is the form when all four feet are off the ground at the same time once in each bound. Cantering resembles galloping with more moderation.

In a pace the horse’s legs move in lateral pairs; it is supported first on the right legs, then on the left. In a single-foot each foot strikes singly, and there are alternately one and two feet on the ground. Because of its delightful rhythm, it is called a fox-trot.

“It’s important to understand the horse’s point of view,” Red stated. “They only see shadows; white objects startle them, and unusual sounds and movements will make a horse shy. I’ve known horses with the ability to pick up all fours and plant them down five feet to the side. Then you want to have a good ‘hairpinned’ grip with your knees.”

To those who have seen but few, if any, polo games, the word “polo” suggests a delightful afternoon with sunshine flooding a gay crowd in the grandstands and a brilliantly green turf under a blue sky with beautiful, high-strung horses ridden by gallant equestrians in white helmets and riding togs.

But the game itself grows fascinating according to Tom Stanton. It is played in 6 chuckers (8 in international games) each about 7½ minutes long. The four men on each team start off from a lineup cross-wise on the center of the field, facing each other and their own goal. The ball is tossed in by the referee and they are off!

The players are numbered: number one man, two, three and four. Number two is the most active player, and is supposed to be in every play. One guards number four, and two and three guard each other. Teamwork is very

“One point that is often misunderstood is that no one man makes the goals: the ball is always being passed,” Stanton explained.

With well-trained horses, the horse is about 90 percent of the game. The horses seem to put human understanding behind their zest in following the ball. And in riding a man off, which is just pushing an opponent out of the way, the horse does most of the pushing, and a rider may push with his shoulders.

The “off-side” of the horse is the right side, and the “near-side” is the left side. There are four possible strokes: off-side forward, off-side backward, near-side forward and near-side backward. In addition there are under the neck shots, tail and belly shots. “Crooking” a mallet is hooking the opponent’s mallet. This is an effective guarding technique.