



ST. CROIX TRAIL BLAZERS

NEWSLETTER

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Communication Between Horses and Humans When Riding

It's well documented that horses are very sensitive animals. They are capable of picking up on emotions, cues, and danger before any human could. For example, I was leading a trail ride down the driveway and knew something was amiss because Zip's body language changed drastically. His head came up, ears went forward, eyes sharpened, and he stopped to smell in the direction of what he was sensing. I let him tell us when it was ok to proceed and not surprisingly, when we made it further forward, an unfamiliar cat was very quietly wandering the woods. Even more interesting, he would not and does not alert like this when "his" cats accompany us on trail rides whether he can see them or not.

When we ride horses, those keen senses remain, and many times riders are communicating both messages they intend to and those they do not. As an equine professional, it is my (and our instructors') role to teach our riders how to properly communicate with their horses so that they can have an enjoyable, harmonious ride. Sometimes a difficult ride can be a better learning experience than a perfectly smooth ride.

Some cues are easy to spot and fairly straightforward to execute: a rider giving their horse a kick, steering, heels being flexed down, etc. Some things a rider is doing with their body are not so easy to see: tight hands/loose hands, where a rider's seat is positioned, relaxed or tense legs, rein contact, and more. The real communication comes in when riders learn *why* we ask the things we do, *when* is the appropriate time to give a cue, and *how much* of a cue do we give?

Therapy horses are highly trained animals. Ours are trained to respond mostly to voice commands (walk, trot/cluck, canter/kiss, whoa). *Why*, for example, would we ask a rider to kick? SCTB horses know leg pressure (squeezing) means to move. Assuming the rider has asked with their voice first, pressure from one leg only would ask the horse to move away from (right or left) while both legs mean forward. Sometimes a rider may lack the strength needed to ask with just a squeeze. Sometimes a horse is feeling particularly tired and decides not to move. This is *when* our instructors ask someone to escalate their cue into a kick. It is a fine balance of *how much* of a kick is needed

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MISSION

St. Croix Trail Blazers' missions are to provide horseback riding, training, and competitive sports opportunities to individuals with special needs in a safe, learning environment through the adaptive equine experience and provide therapeutic riding and activities for active duty or veteran military personnel to enhance their physical, emotional, and social well-being.

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and each horse has a different tolerance level that riders need to learn. Beyond legs, crops can be used on a horse that has not responded to the three previous requests. Crops are what is considered an “artificial aid” and can be used incorrectly very easily. We only offer crops to riders who have shown they can maintain proper form and have demonstrated proper use of the tool.

Here’s a few other common cues you will hear an instructor asking for:

- **Heels down:** elongating the leg muscles so they can “wrap” around the horse and physically placing the heel lower than the stirrup both helps to anchor a rider in place and also helps to ensure their foot will not slide through a stirrup. A foot through a stirrup is a very dangerous error.
- **Sit on your bottom/sit back/sit forward/sit up:** Core position is one of the first things a rider learns. Horses naturally want to move with you, and it is much easier on them to not fight their rider. Therapy horses even more so. A rider that is leaning forward, even slightly, can unknowingly be asking their horse to move forward. This message is doubled if a rider is also squeezing their legs, which is often a subconscious reaction to being nervous. Their horse can feel them leaning and wants to move to “catch up” with them. So long as they are leaning forward so too will their horse move forward. We ask riders to sit back to help communicate to their horse that we are not asking them to move. The reverse is also true! A rider slouching or leaning back is not only at risk of being “left behind” should their horse spook, but they are also inadvertently asking their horse to sloooooow down, sometimes to the point of a full stop.
- **Drop your hands/pick your hands up:** Every horse’s anatomy is slightly different. Some horses are “high headed,” some not as much. Each horse has an ideal position where a rider’s hands to be. Some horses require your hands almost resting on the saddle (but never actually resting! Steering goes out the window when hands aren’t ready to move), and some horses need elbows bent almost 90 degrees and up high.
- **Loosen your reins/tighten your reins:** It takes quite the finesse to find just the right tightness on reins for each horse to be happy. Too tight and you may have a horse tossing their head (they are saying LET GO!), refusing to move forward, or who will end up with a sore mouth. Too loose and a rider may have much less control of their horse than they should. Some horses like to lean on the reins (Cooper and Willow) and require a lot of hand strength. Some horses want zero rein pressure (Zip and Titan) and will fuss if they don’t get it. All the other horses fall somewhere in the middle, and it also depends on who is riding them.

There is so much more that goes into riding than this short list. As you can tell, really nailing down all of these skills takes quite some time...and then it is time to move to a different horse who has a whole set of new requirements and preferences! Cycling riders onto different horses helps keep riders learning and growing. Our instructors have spent years mastering the art of horseback riding and thoroughly enjoy helping others hone their skills as well. I hope this article has shed some light into what is being communicated than what is plainly visible and how hard riders are working. If it looks easy, they are doing a fantastic job! If it looks hard or frustrating, they’re learning!

By Kellie Grayden, Program Director

Rider in the Spotlight: Lisa

SCTB: How long have you been riding with St. Croix Trail Blazers?

Lisa: 18 months.

SCTB: What horse(s) do you ride?

Lisa: Epic and Zip.

SCTB: Do you have a favorite horse?

Lisa: Zip.

SCTB: What is your favorite thing about riding?

Lisa: Riding is relaxing for me, and I like the obstacle course. I like trotting and trail rides



when the weather is nice.

SCTB: Do you have any hobbies?

Lisa: I like bicycle riding and doing word finds.

SCTB: Do you play other sports?

Lisa: I like bowling, and I have tried archery.

SCTB: Anything you want to add?

Lisa: I like hay rides, and I like to shoot basketball hoops in the park.

Rider in the Spotlight: Vica

SCTB: How long have you been riding with St. Croix Trail Blazers?

Vica: About five years.

SCTB: What horse(s) do you ride?

Vica: Vanna, Cooper, Mister, Willow. Used to ride Diezel.

SCTB: Do you have a favorite horse?

Vica: Yes, Vanna Banana.

SCTB: What is your favorite thing about riding?

Vica: I like the instructors, and I like the patterns. And I like



the barrels that we did in Special Olympics.

SCTB: Do you have any hobbies?

Vica: Horses of course. Archery. And hopefully going back to Tae Kwon Do soon.

SCTB: Do you play other sports?

Vica: Same as hobbies.

SCTB: Anything you want to add?

Vica: I am out going and like to make new friends.

How Amazon Smile Can Help Us

Has Amazon shopping been keeping you busy since the pandemic? Want to make a little something more of your purchases and make a donation to St. Croix Trail Blazers at the same time without hurting your pocketbook? Instead of logging into your Amazon account via the normal website, try using Amazon Smile instead! Simply go to <https://smile.amazon.com> and enter your usual credentials to log in. From there, hover over your name at the top and click on AmazonSmile Charity Lists, as seen below.

Once on the list page, you will find a search tab. Enter "St. Croix Trail", and our charity will pop up. Click on the photo of our name with the feed bag and St. Croix Trail Blazers will be added to your charity list. AmazonSmile will donate 0.5% from all eligible purchases when you shop.

and the rest will be easy! You will be able to purchase anything you would normally purchase from the regular Amazon website, but a small portion is donated towards helping our organization grow.

On the Amazon menu bar at the top, if you have added our charity successfully, you will see our name as shown below, and if you click on the drop-down arrow, you will see the amount of money AmazonSmile has donated from your purchases. The more you spend, the more they donate! Every little bit helps.

Just remember to sign into smile.amazon.com each time you shop,

Make-Up Reminder



If St. Croix Trail Blazers cancels your lesson, you will have a make-up lesson. **You have 30 days to schedule that lesson with Kellie.** Please do so by email so there is a written record: kellie@stcroixtrailblazers.org.

Thanks!

St. Croix Trail Blazers' Logo

Did you know the St. Croix Trail Blazers' logo is trademarked? That means the organization is the owner of the logo and it should not be used for personal use. In order for our logo to be reproduced on brochures, clothing, etc., we have to give authorization for that to happen.



We love seeing our riders wearing St. Croix Trail Blazers clothing; knowing they proudly wear it. We are working with another vendor to set up clothing items for you to purchase. More information will come once we have all the details finalized.

When Is it too Hot to Ride?

If you are hot, Your horse is hotter: Horses overheat 10x faster than Humans!



- It only takes about 17 minutes of moderate intensity exercise in hot & humid weather for your horse to overheat.
- Beware of Humidity! Moist air mixed with high temperatures, can be dangerous since it will slow the rate at which sweat evaporates. This will make it much more difficult for your horse to cool itself.
- **Temperature + Humidity:** Add the temperature with humidity and that number will tell you if it's too hot for your horse. If the total is 130 or more, there is serious risk of overheating your horse.
For Example: 80°F + 50% Humidity = 130
Below 130- Good to go! Your horse can cool themselves properly assuming adequate hydration.
130-170- Caution! Your horse's ability to cool themselves is only partially functioning.
170 or above- Stop! Your horse's ability to cool themselves is seriously hindered. Extra cooling procedures should be used.
- It can be very serious if a horse's body temperature raises from the normal 100° to 105°
- Horses suffering from excessive heat stress can experience Hypotension, Colic and Renal Failure.
- Working muscles can reach temperatures of nearly 110°F which is the temperature at which Muscle proteins begin to cook.
- Horses can sweat up to 15-20 liters per hour in cool/dry conditions and up to 30 in hot/humid conditions.
- Only 25-30% of the sweat your horse produces is effective in cooling them, as opposed to 50% in humans
- The salt in a horse's sweat is 4x more concentrated than in humans. So they lose more salt when they sweat. That will need to be replaced.
- The best way to cool your horse is to rinse them in cool water, scrape off excess water and repeat. You can lower your horse's temperature by 2° every 10 minutes by using this method.

Stay Cool this Summer! Happy Trails!

www.CampCorrals.com

Our Email Addresses

You can reach these people at their email addresses:

Karen: karen@stcroixtrailblazers.org

Kellie: kellie@stcroixtrailblazers.org



Please remember to check your spam or junk folder for any updates from St. Croix Trail Blazers.



If you bring a new rider who joins the team, we'll give you \$50 off your next month's fee!

Rider must pass evaluation with instructor.



Special People Needing Special Horses

Contact Us



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Facebook: [St. Croix Trail Blazers](https://www.facebook.com/St.CroixTrailBlazers)

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St. Croix Trail Blazers is tax-exempt under Section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Service.

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