

Living to Extremes with Joyce Lewis

by Jennifer W. Becton

How does one go from riding sedate dressage tests in a shadbelly and breeches to rocketing through Craig Cameron's Extreme Cowboy Race obstacle course in a cowboy hat and jeans? By opening herself to different training techniques, Joyce Lewis has also opened herself to new opportunities both in the equestrian world and to exciting extremes in her life.

Joyce began her riding career at the age of thirteen when her parents bought her first horse, complete with all the requisite tack. Quickly discarding the saddle, she was content to ride the black pony bareback, reveling in the joy that horses often bring to young girls. But knowing the value of proper riding techniques, Joyce's parents signed her up for dressage lessons, and she learned the discipline required to be a good equestrienne.

As a young woman, other disciplines took precedence over horses, and Joyce pursued a career in the Air Force and later in real estate. A successful businesswoman, she longed to return to horses, and her sister accommodated her by purchasing her a horse of undetermined breeding named Josh. A big bay gelding, Josh turned out to be more of a predator than a peaceful companion. Rather than experiencing the carefree bareback rides of her youth, Joyce dealt with disrespectful behavior and unpleasant rides. Josh's disrespect also manifested itself in attempts bite and strike her, and his favorite pastime seemed to be squashing her toes under his hooves.

What had begun as a fulfilled dream had turned into a nightmare. At that low point in her relationship with Josh, Joyce discovered natural horsemanship training by watching RFD-TV, and the direction of her equestrian life changed for the better. From that moment forward, she was hooked on natural horsemanship, and this newfound passion led her to glean from the techniques of many trainers. Once she learned how to gain Josh's respect, trail riding became a pleasure. In fact, Joyce became an active participant in the North American Trail Ride Conference (NATRC, Region Five), which expanded her understanding of muscle conditioning, hydration, heart rate, and soundness and which helped prepare her for her next equestrian challenge: the Extreme Cowboy Race.

Competing with Josh in RFD-TV's Extreme Cowboy Race was the culmination of all Joyce's equestrian experiences—NATRC, natural horsemanship, and even dressage. She said, "The first time I saw a cowboy run his horse through a tipped up hay ring, I thought, now that's a trained horse. She immediately recreated the course and began to push herself and Josh to new levels. "What I realized during our training was that it wasn't at all about the obstacles we were doing, it was about having the respect of my horse and having complete control of his body."

Joyce submitted a demo tape to the producers of the Extreme Cowboy Race, and thanks to this quirky video, she was selected out of hundreds of applicants to participate in season six of the show. The race is a timed obstacle course designed to take teams outside their comfort zones and to test communication between horse and rider. This former dressage rider was required to wield a rope, open gates from horseback, and negotiate enormous moguls.

Josh, the former toe-squasher, did not put a hoof out of place, and the pair finished in the top eight.

Following her success with Josh, Joyce and her mount Khamaal AB, a four-year-old purebred Arabian gelding owned by Loretta Melton of Arabah Brook Arabians, have been invited to participate in the upcoming Extreme Cowboy Race All-Girl Challenge, which will take place at the Double Horn Ranch in Bluffdale, Texas, and will be aired on RFD-TV in early 2009.

Building on her passion for training and for helping people enjoy their horses, Joyce created Safe Horse Training through which she offers lessons and clinics in natural horsemanship techniques. With the help of her husband Ken and her sons, Connor and Spencer, Joyce is sharing her passion for horses and her knowledge of training techniques so that other horse lovers will also be able to live to extremes.

Joyce Lewis is located in Mount Pleasant, North Carolina. For more information or to arrange a lesson or clinic, visit Joyce's website at www.safehorsetraining.com. Email her at safehorsetraining@yahoo.com or call 704-836-6201. And don't forget to watch Joyce in the Extreme Cowboy Race All-Girl Challenge on RFD-TV in early 2009!



**Joyce Lewis and Josh Competing in Season Six of
The Extreme Cowboy Race**