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***Why train with obstacles? My horse and I do dressage, why would I need obstacle training? My horse and I aren't ready for obstacles; he's too green. I have a 3 year old; can he do obstacle training? I hear all sorts of questions around obstacle training. It seems a little misunderstood at times. Let me try to explain the purpose, applicability, and advantages.***



***How many times have you gone out for a ride and your horse acts frightened of something you think is nothing? Let's say you walk your horse out of the barn and there's a plastic bag blowing on the ground that wasn't there the day before. What does your horse do? Many times they're afraid and their instinctual flight response kicks in. Horses have this 6<sup>th</sup> sense that tells them to run before the monster eats them. Obstacle training can help your horse develop trust in you over time instead of listening to their flight response.***

***One of the beauties of obstacle training is that you can start it from the day your horse is born. Calmly rubbing your newborn foal with a towel or your hand is part of obstacle training! Building on that foundation with incremental steps over the course of the horse's life forms a bond like no other.***

***So you may say your discipline is dressage, reining, eventing, pleasure.... Regardless, everyone wants a safe, calm, willing, and controlled horse irrespective of discipline. For example, when that dressage horse enters the ring at letter A, if he is fearful of the judge's stand at the other end of the arena at letter C or the child with the balloon attached to his stroller on the rail, it's unlikely he'll make a straight line in his pattern. When your horse's focus is not on you, it doesn't matter what discipline you ride, the effect will be the same. Or how about the young horse whose rider says they're not ready. The level of the obstacle has to start at the basic***



**Equation 1 - Shamrock as a 3 year old at the North American Police Equestrian Championships finishing the dressage pattern.**

***foundation and build up. It's the young horse that benefits greatly by starting at this fundamental level. Applying the strategies and methods we teach from our experience in the mounted police traverses all disciplines and age to help the horse understand they are safe when they trust you.***

**Obstacle training can increase your horse's focus and attention. The advantages are numerous. Not only do you get a calmer horse, but a more confident, happy horse that can focus longer on your requests. This may**



Obstacle Competition 1 - Shamrock on the Obstacle Course

**seem like a tall order, but if the obstacle training is developed correctly, the results can be impressive. Every horse can take baby steps towards building their trust with obstacle training. There are also fun challenges in obstacle training. Your imagination is the only limitation. Well thought-out, safe, creative obstacles have revived bored,**

**spoiled horses, as well as inspired their riders. Obstacle**

**training, when correctly applied, can provide exponential dividends in the partnership of the horse and rider team!**

**I've seen many a skittish horse over the years in my teaching and every single one has individually improved if the rider is receptive to this training. 'The slower you go, the faster you'll get there' is an age-old horse-training concept. Obstacle training can be the enhancement to your riding to create that perfect accompaniment to your equestrian program. There are also lots of emerging sports evolving from obstacle fun! Whatever they're called - Trail Trial, Trial Challenge, Versatility**



Trail Trial Fun 1

**Challenge, Obstacle Challenge, Cowboy Challenge, Cowboy Race, Trail Rally, Judged Trail Ride, Versatile Horse & Rider, etc. – they're fun to test your new found skills of obstacle horsemanship! After all, having fun is hopefully what it's all about! Enjoy your obstacle training!**