

## UNH Hosts Horse Trials

By Jessica Fredyma

On October 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> the University of New Hampshire hosted its biannual *Horse Trials*. This event is held on the first weekend of October and May, and this year marks the University's 32<sup>nd</sup> year hosting the *Horse Trials*. *Horse Trials* are a Triathlon for horses. Horses and their riders are required to compete in 3 different events over a period of 2 days. These events are Dressage, Cross Country Jumping and Stadium Jumping. The *UNH Horse Trials* is completely student run, under the direction of Equine Program Director Janet Briggs. The *UNH Horse Trials* offer Novice, Training and Preliminary levels of competition. More than 80 students enrolled in the Horsemanship program are responsible for various tasks prior to the event, which include painting fences, grounds maintenance, publicity, and set-up. The students are also required to work the day of the event as Cross Country fence judges, Scorers, Warm-up Stewards and Timers. This event is recognized by 2 major Equestrian organizations the United States Eventing Association (USEA) and USA Equestrian Inc. (USAE). At the highest levels Eventing is a part of the Summer Olympic Games.

The *Horse Trials* is a component of the sport of Eventing. While a *Horse Trials* has 3 events, and is held over a 2 day period, Eventing (also known as a 3-day Event) is held over a 3 day period and includes 6 events, Dressage, Cross Country, Stadium Jumping and in addition, Steeplechase and 2 phases of Roads and Tracks.

The sport of Eventing has a rich history. It was originated as a test by which Cavalry horses were evaluated. Officers competed on the mounts that carried them over the battlefield and was a way for the officers to compete against one another. Each phase of a *Horse Trials* is designed to show off a horse's skill in that particular event.

The first phase is Dressage. Dressage is a French word meaning, "training" this event shows off the horses submission to the rider and acceptance of the rider's aids. The horse and rider complete a series of complicated movements in a specified order. The horse is expected to perform the movements as if on his own accord and in harmony with his rider. The horse is marked on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the best) on each of the movements called for in the test. Gaits, Impulsion, Submission and Rider are also awarded scores from 1 to 10 and are judged from the overall impression of the test. Dressage benefits the horse by training the horse to use his body in the most effective way. The horse develops suppleness, balance and rhythm as a result of proper Dressage training. Dressage, which is a sport in itself, is often referred to as "Ballet on Horseback" and is the most graceful of all equestrian sports.

The second phase of the *Horse Trials* is Cross Country Jumping. This is the most exciting and dangerous phase, both for horse and rider. Horses are expected to gallop over varying types of terrain, and jump over "natural" obstacles. These "natural" obstacles include ditches, logs, banks, water and shrubs. The objective of the Cross Country phase is to test the horse's boldness and endurance. The horse is expected to jump over any obstacle that is placed in its path without refusing it jump it. The Cross Country course ranges from 1.5 miles to over 4 miles at the highest levels, and can include from 15 to 45 elements, which must be navigated. Horse and rider are penalized for both completing the course too quickly (which can cause accidents by going too quickly over they jumps) or by going too slowly. The optimum course time is determined by both the length of the course and by the level at which the pair is competing.

The third and final phase of a *Horse Trials* is Stadium Jumping. In this event the horse must navigate a course of jumps with rails that can be knocked down should the horse brush them in its attempt to jump the obstacle. Each fallen rail counts as 5 penalty points and penalty points are also awarded for taking longer than the

optimum time. Stadium Jumping takes place directly after Cross Country and tests both the recovery time and endurance of the horse.

The *UNH Horse Trials* is the only *Horse Trials* run in the state of New Hampshire. Each year over 140 competitors participate in the *Fall Horse Trials* as well as the *Spring Horse Trials*. This provides a unique opportunity for students who participate in the Horsemanship program as well as students who are Equine Science Majors. Students who are enrolled in the 4-year Bachelor's Degree Program enjoy the benefit of hands on experience working on a show of this caliber.

The University of New Hampshire's Equine Program provides students with the experience and strong background to be competitive in today's job market. Equine Students can choose to follow an Agra-Business or Equine Management focus. Students enroll in a variety of classes from Animal Nutrition, Sports Medicine and Lameness, Equine Business Management, Young Horse Training as well as Artificial Insemination to name a few. UNH boasts the only University run artificial insemination laboratory in New Hampshire and every year top name and local stallions are collected and their valuable deposit is shipped out to breeders both nationally and internationally.

In addition to equine focused academic classes the UNH Equine Program also offers a Horsemanship class in which UNH students develop and improve their riding skills. The UNH riding program focuses on Balanced Seat riding, which gives students a solid base and position from which the student can branch off and follow whatever riding discipline they choose. Students develop their skills both on the flat and over fences. The program offers Beginner, Advanced Beginner, Intermediate 1, Intermediate 2 and Advanced levels of riding. Students in their first semester of Beginner/Adv. Beginner/I-1 and I-2/Advanced are required to attend a lecture in addition to their 3 hours of lab/riding time.

UNH also offers two Equestrian teams for students who are enrolled in the Horsemanship program. The UNH Intercollegiate Dressage Team consists of 4 members and is currently the top ranked Intercollegiate Dressage Team in the Northeast. The UNH Intercollegiate Horseshow Association (IHA) Team is open to any student who is participating in the Horsemanship program. Students can compete in as few or as many shows as they choose. In the IHA Teams first show October 5<sup>th</sup> 11 of the 12 students who competed came home in the ribbons. The UNH Equestrian Teams are off to a strong start this year and are looking forward to continued success.

Any UNH student regardless of major may enroll in the UNH Horsemanship program. Students who enjoy horses and would like to meet other UNH students with the same interest can join the UNH Horseman's Club. This newly formed Club is participating in this year's Homecoming festivities by designing a homecoming t-shirt and riding on a float in the Homecoming parade.

The UNH Equine Program also gives back to the community by offering a Therapeutic Riding Program for kids and adults with emotional and physical disabilities. UNH student volunteers support this program by acting as horse handlers and side-walkers supporting the Therapeutic Riding students. By interacting with the horses Therapeutic Riding students develop better hand-eye coordination, exercise muscles that are not used regularly or cannot be controlled by the student, and creates a sense of accomplishment and confidence by being able to control an animal much larger than himself or herself. The program prides its self on safety and provides both a stimulating and challenging environment for the students. Students participate in mounted games and grooming sessions that allow them to form a bond between themselves and the horse. For more information on the UNH Therapeutic Riding Program visit their website at [www.trp.unh.edu](http://www.trp.unh.edu).

The UNH horse barn is open to the public daily. Everyone is encouraged to come and watch lessons in both our indoor and outdoor arenas as well as visit the UNH horses.

