Texas Trail Challenge Club Newsletter

July / August 2026

Lead Rope Safety Refresher, courtesy Technical Animal Safety by Willis Lamm (FaceBook)

The Pressley Whitacre story is not unique, and I'll spare everyone a repeat of posting images of equestrians having been degloved, losing hands or being dragged to death. Lead rope safety is a critical issue. My crew knows that carelessness will bring out some serious venom. More recently I commented on poor lead rope handling techniques shown in an image of a training event. Train properly. NO EXCUSES.

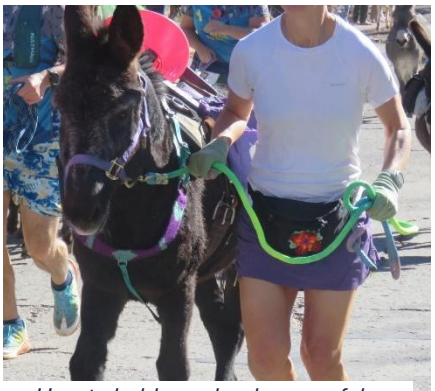
In 1995 I co-organized the "Equestrian Crash Course" that involved a multitude of entities including fire, EMS, RACES, Cal-Star, Harbor View trauma nurses, a trauma physician, and local trainers and equestrians. (We even had a stunt rider stage a crash, with fire, EMS and a medical helicopter arriving at-scene.) *The two most common causes of life-altering injuries involved lack of helmet use and improper lead rope handling*.

In fact, as the trauma surgeon was in the middle of his presentation on traumatic hand injuries due to improper lead rope handling, his pager sounded as he was called to, yes, try to save someone's hand. That "accident" was not staged.

Lead ropes are not stiff lariats. We don't hold them in closed loops. If the horse startles, the loop(s) can suck tight against your fingers before you can get them clear. If you're lucky, the horse stops. If you're not, you either get dragged or you lose fingers or a hand.

Getting dragged usually ends horribly as most horses will flee from a person being dragged... along with the people running to try to catch up. NEVER, as in NEVER EVER leave a loose coil of rope around your hand. Butterfly (figure eight) the excess lead back and forth in your free hand.

So, let's talk about how to hold a lead rope. I'll use an example when a medical helicopter came in for a real landing at an event because a person wasn't holding a lead



How to hold your lead rope safely

UPCOMING EVENTS

July 1--registrations opens

Hoot N Hollar at McCowan Valley, Lake Whitney

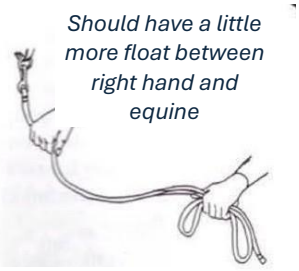
Ride managers Vicki Van Steyn & Sylvia Perry

August 1--registration opens

Salute to the Troops at C-Bar Stables, Valley Mills

Ride managers Ann Stacy and Kris Maley

rope properly, got pulled off balance when the horse startled, and the horse freight-trained a lady some distance away that ironically happened to be the horse's prior owner. Improper holding of a lead rope reduces control. The best way to grip the lead rope is palm down, thumb facing the handler with pinky finger facing the horse. There are several reasons for this handhold. First, this grip makes it practical to buttress if the horse gets strong. You can retract your arm and lower your center of gravity. Second, your thumb can help lock your grip. Third, if things get hectic and you can't hold on, you can simply drop the rope. It won't burn across your palm, and



Courtesy of NATRC

you don't risk the end of the rope slapping you upside your face. You can maintain reasonable float in the lead rope. Float is important for several reasons.

First, the horse needs to move its head for balance, and movement discourages opposition reflex. A reasonable amount of float will allow for this while still controlling direction. Second, too short of a lead will tend to drag the handler into the horse if the horse jerks its head up or over, creating a balance issue with the handler and potentially causing a foot to get stepped on. Third, with reasonable float in the lead rope, if the horse crowds me or I need it to turn away, I can raise my hand holding the lead and with my thumb still gripping the lead and slightly flutter my fingers next to the horse's eye. In all my years doing this stuff I've never met a horse that wants to push its eyeball into the back of my hand.

It's one thing to talk about this stuff. What everyone needs to do is practice proper handling techniques, so it becomes second nature. If things tip up, the horse isn't going to pause for you to sort things out. Peace out. Everyone goes home (in one piece.)

FUN-draiser at the Cadence Bank Center

Who put the 'fun' in "FUN-draiser"? TTCC does!!! Who puts the 'fun' in "FUNdamentals"? TTCC does!!! Some of you may already know that TTCC was given a great opportunity to earn money for our organization by parking cars at the Cadence Bank Center in Belton, Texas, for various graduations at the end of May. This has been a great time for all horse lovers to utilize the horsemanship fundamentals we have been practicing at our trail challenges. Real world application was implemented as volunteers directed parking with pedestrians everywhere, and surrounded by flags,

drones, bicycles, motorcycles, vans, buses, 18 wheelers, balloons, banners, and loud banging music. They also helped capture a rogue bull calf, never a dull moment! Horse and rider relationships grew by leaps and bounds as well as fun and fellowship with our coworkers. Volunteers came from all over, members, non-members, and sponsors, on horseback, foot and in recreational vehicles to raise $3600 for Texas Trail Challenge Club. Volunteers included Carin Bauer, Cheryl Sofaly, Jackie Bonner, Annaliese Scoggin, Marta Covington, Vicki Van Steyn, Scott & Priscilla Butcher, Deb Sannwaldt, Keenia Cowey, Kris Maley, Sharon Price, Rhonda Fryer, Tiffany Janke, Sara McMillan, Mary Carlisle, Juli Steele, Laura McLean, Ruth Ann Pieri, and Donnie Eaton. After working the teams celebrated at several local restaurants, Mexican food & margaritas one night, and crepes another! TTCC has been offered additional opportunities to work on August 1-2. If you bring your horse, there will be a stall and a hook-up for your trailer. Carin said, "We are only as successful as the people that support and surround us. TTCC is a great organization with awesome horse people eager to learn and grow their fundamentals and fellowship." If you are interested in participating in the next fundraiser contact Carin Bauer for more information. THANK YOU Carin and all the volunteers!!!

New Member - Mary Carlisle talking to graduates
Photos by Scott Butcher

Judges Training and Fall Rider Clinic - by Kelly Beard, Judges Director

The TTCC Judges, of Class of 2025-26, have been getting plenty of experience by judging the Spring rides. We are glad to have Becky Cash, Kris Maley, Annaliese Scoggin, Cheryl Sofaly, and Vicki Van Steyn on board as qualified TTCC Judges.

On Friday, September 18th, judges will meet at Vicki Van Steyn's home for training and to discuss issues brought to us by riders regarding judging consistency and clarification of codes and obstacle requirements.

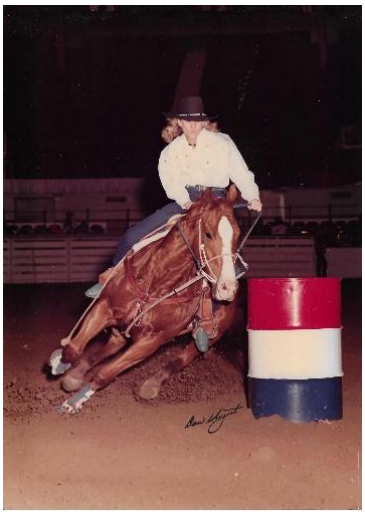
The next day, September 19th, the Fall Rider's Clinic will be held at Vicki Van Steyn's stables. Vicki hosted the Spring Rider's Clinic in March. The thirty-three participants in that clinic were amazed at the plethora of obstacles and appreciative of the chance to try them with the help of experienced

clinicians. The clinic ended with the team competition with the winning clinician (coach) and teams earning bragging rights! We hope to have the same level of participation and are looking forward to working on horsemanship, confidence building, and gait transitions. Get registered to join us!

GETTING TO KNOW YOU - JUNE & JERRY GILBERT

Home is 45 acres on the far outskirts of Kemp, about an hour southeast of Dallas. After a 20-year career with Bank of America, I was blessed to become a stay-at-home Mom (busiest job ever)! Jerry is still counting down to his retirement in May 2029 after 37 years with Venture Mechanical, a commercial HVAC company. Married for 30 wonderful years, we raised three sons who have flown the nest but have blessed us with two grandchildren (so far) to help us master the art of spoiling little ones and happily sending them home.

Horses have been a part of life for as long as I have memories. I have horseback pictures with my dad when I may have been 2 years old and on my own mount by age 5. Jerry's journey to get in a saddle came later as he wasn't introduced to horses until 1994 after we met for the first time on a street corner during the annual Fort Worth Pioneer Days event. Like any great man, he embraced my horse addiction and did his best to catch up. Our current herd encompasses four quarter horse geldings. Shorty is the retired senior, a former cutting horse and grandson of Doc O'Lena. Shorty has been with us since he was a 4-year-old and is still looking good at the spry old age of 30. The riding string includes 12-year-old Gizmo (with Mr. Illuminator in his pedigree), 11-year-old Scooby by Gunners Special Nite, and the energetic baby of the bunch, 5-year-old Hancock-bred Utah. Our neighbor, Shawna Parks (also a TTCC member), pointed me in the direction of the Club after discovering it on Facebook and signing one of her sons up for a clinic. She encouraged us to join last year where we all attended the 2025 Spring clinic, and our first full ride was the recent Cat Spring Fling this April. Jerry and I were both new to trail/obstacle



challenges, so I couldn't have been more tickled for Scooby and I to pull in 3rd place Senior Maverick on day 1 and come back for 1st place on day two. Jerry improved his Adult Tenderfoot placings from 5th on day one to 4th on day two and was very appreciative of the feedback in areas where he and Utah struggled. The format and the casual spirit of the competition was perfect and had us ready to sign up for the next ride. Maybe there will be some year-end awards in our future! Jerry's true passions are jiu jitsu (black belt) and motorcycles (several), but he's a willing riding partner and genuinely enjoys our horse adventures. I have dabbled in everything from play days and drill team to competitive barrel racing. Nowadays, I'm happy to trade high-speed runs for the occasional ranch class at a local show, the relaxed pace of a TTCC ride, a laid-back horse camping adventure or just a daily jog through the pasture. Our horse community is a small handful of friends, and we look forward to getting to know more of the TTCC gang.

We tell our children that we don't have favorites, but I know that's ok with horses because some just steal a bigger piece of your heart. For Jerry, that horse is Utah. Having owned him since he was 2 ½, the two have grown together. I've had a number of good horses that each fulfilled a different phase and while I don't think any has ever elevated itself to "heart horse", I have to give the bigger piece of my heart to Gizmo—a horse with quirks, not much personality and probably not one for the faint of heart as potential buyers said "he scared them". I was on the hunt for that "fancy" broke horse when Scooby filled the bill in January 2025 and was in the process of selling Gizmo until a trusted horseman's words stopped me. "He might not check all your boxes, but I've watched you as well as others with this horse and YOU are HIS person." That was all it took and here I am with a Gizmo and a Scooby to share my time.

Taking a stroll down memory lane, one of our favorite adventures dates all the way back to 1999 when we attended a 3-day Craig Cameron clinic. Aside from horsemanship tips from a great one, our accommodation consisted of a reconstructed one room log cabin, transported from the hills of Missouri, and meals prepared pre-dawn to dusk by an award-winning chuck wagon Cook. Jerry recalls that experience as the time he felt the shift and became relaxed and comfortable on a horse. That may be hard to grasp for those of us that have been with horses since we were in diapers but if you started later in life, I think you'll get why this was a big milestone. It's hard to have a favorite TTCC memory since we've only attended one full ride, but first impression is that the recent Cat Spring Fling is going to be tough to beat!

At the end of the day - "Time spent on a horse is time well spent."

RIDE RECAP – Cat Spring Fling

Lynane Plumlee, Carolyn Mikiska, and Raylene Welch at the Happy Horse Hotel
Photos by Rhonda Fryer

Cat Spring Fling was held at the beautiful 7IL Ranch on April 25 and 26, and co-managed by first time ride managers Tonya Lindsey and Jackie Bonner. This 2100-acre ranch has barefoot friendly sandy trails, with gently rolling hills, creek crossings, and ponds. The ranch features electric hook-ups, a bathhouse with showers, arena, round pen, a pavilion, and an obstacle course. This ranch has been in the Reznicek family since 1863 and raises cattle and hay. Melissa Neal was Senior Judge, assisted by Lissa Rabon, Jean Wilson, Cheryl Sofaly, and Vickie Van Steyn. Jim Miller was trail master for the 8 mile trail and approximately twenty-eight riders completed obstacles including a gate, side pass, uphill with a hidden judge, ground tie, trashy trail, moving a bell along a rope, trotting or loping over cavaletti and side pass . The ride secretary was Tiffany Janke, assisted by Rawan Spann and Rhonda Fryer was the photographer. The weather was warm and sunny with nice breezes. Analeise Scoggin, who worked for Texas State Parks and Wildlife for sixteen years, gave a lovely presentation about the beautiful wildflowers and other plants from the ranch. In about an hour she gathered 56 specimens including wildflowers, edibles, and toxic plants to show to the group. Dinner featured delicious fried chicken with participants bringing a wide variety of sides and desserts.

Annalise Scoggin and Winchester side passing

Truly was tired at the 10th obstacle and thought she had found a pillow!

Tom Blackmon and Edd

SURVEY SAYS. . .

Summary of 2026 Rider Survey:

Why do you come and ride with TTCC?

Riders marked their three primary reasons, and the 4 main reasons are:

- **To enjoy riding in new places**
- **For the weekend away with my friends, and/or my horse**
- **To learn how to be a better horseman, and build a better bond with my horse**
- **To challenge myself and my horse**

Riders marked their "priorities" (Low/Medium/High) for 18 types of ride activities. The following are the top seven "High" priority items:

1. **Being encouraged and supported by club members**
2. **Having SAFE obstacles (based on rider experience level)**
3. **Having awesome YEAR-END awards, prizes, and celebration**
4. **Judge's briefings after each ride**
5. **Having 10 obstacles at every ride**
6. **Having two day weekend rides (versus one day rides)**
7. **Keeping obstacle wait times to 15 minutes or less**

Why do you come and ride with TTCC? 44 riders replied

(please mark three items)

- **24 - To enjoy riding in new places**
- **22 - For the weekend away with my friends, and/or my horse**
- **24 - To learn how to be a better horseman, and build a better bond with my horse**
- **7 - To be encouraged and trained via Judges and obstacles**
- **23 - To challenge myself and my horse**
- **1 - To compete, get recognized, and win awards**
- **1 - Because the catered meals are awesome**

How important to You, are the following?

(please mark each line with Low, Medium, High based on your priority)

	Low	Med	High
Having two day weekend rides (versus one day rides)	5	10	27
Having 7 ride weekends a year	12	21	8
Having 10 ride weekends a year	15	14	13
Getting prizes (in addition to ribbons) for each day's ride	13	20	9
Having awesome YEAR-END awards, prizes, and celebration	3	9	32
Keeping ride fees as low as possible	2	19	18
Being encouraged and supported by club members	0	2	35
Having the Saturday evening ride meal catered (for a fee)	10	15	12
Keeping Saturday evening meal cost as low as possible	8	24	10
Having SAFE obstacles (based on rider experience level)	1	10	32
Judge's briefings after each ride	2	9	31
Making 8 miles the maximum ride length	14	14	14
Lots of Laughs (via skits and entertainment)	13	17	12
Having 10 obstacles at every ride	2	13	28
Keeping obstacle wait times to less than 15 minutes	3	14	25
Having 6 obstacles at every ride	22	10	3
Having a new T-Shirt for each year with rides listed	23	14	7
Having "learning moments" available	10	14	17

Texas Trail Challenge Club
Board of Directors Minutes
April 2026

8:10 Meeting called to order. All directors and treasurer present.

Director Reports

Minutes/Ride Management: Director Boore reported a low number of ride participants. Board discussed potential solutions to include a survey to members to gather feedback.

Judge Director: Director Beard discussed possible fundraiser. Discussion was tabled at this time

Membership Director: Nothing to report

Treasurer: Treasurer Thurlow reported $10,987.00 is current balance. Recent expenditures included legal fees for bylaws and a new printer.

Committee Reports:

None at this time

Upcoming Events

Cat Spring Fling. Low number of participants to this ride. As of meeting, there were only 10 paid slots.

Closed Actions:

None at this time

Unfinished Business and General Orders:

1. Director Boore reported Ride Manager Manual was recently updated. No further action needed
2. Fundraiser for 2026: tabled at this time
3. Standing Action: documents and file storage; archiving; working docs; sops for different procedures are being updated and filed by President Butcher

New Business

1. BOD discussed an in person meeting this summer. Discussion was tabled at this time
2. President Butcher requested a purchase of a new first aid kit/bag. BOD approved up to $200 for kit.
3. Director Boore will turn over Celebration Awards to Marilyn Blackmon. A budget of $5000 was approved for awards.
4. Director Boore will check with vendors on misspelling of two buckles and reorder if necessary. Further an Iron Rider vest will be embroidered.
5. Director Steele will process new membership applications from last ride and update file.
6. Treasurer Thurlow will send out survey to general membership and request responses

Meeting adjourned 9:26

Texas Trail Challenge Club
Board of Directors Minutes
May 2026

8:06 Meeting called to order. All directors and treasurer present.
April Minutes approved
Director Reports
Ride Management: Ride calendar for 2027 currently has 6 rides penciled in.
Judge Director: Director Beard plans a Fall Ride Clinic for Sept 19 th. Discussion for Judges training and possible fundraiser ride in conjunction with Fall Clinic. Director Boore and Director Beard will discuss before further presentation.
Membership Director: Nothing to report
Treasurer: Treasurer Thurlow reported $10,887.00 is current balance. Treasurer Thurlow discussed income of club is under half of years '24 and '25. Low number of participation and lack of fundraisers. President Butcher discussed upcoming fundraiser for parking during graduation that Carin Bauer is heading up would help with projected expenses. Further needed is more fundraisers (raffle) and sponsors.
Committee Reports:
Bylaws discussed. President Butcher will have a sheet discussing changes drafted up to present to members along with updated bylaws. Further discussion tabled at this time. BOD will meet on May 26 at 8pm to discuss and vote on bylaws. Then will be sent to general membership.
Upcoming Events - Fall rider clinic Sept 19th
Closed Actions:
None at this time
Unfinished Business and General Orders:
None at this time
New Business

1. Discussion on Club Newsletter. Currently going to 270 plus on mailing list. Will have 2 separate mailing lists, one for Newsletter and one for Newsletter to include minutes. Newsletter with minutes will only go to paid members.
2. Treasurer Thurlow is collecting data from general membership on club. Information is still being compiled at this time.
3. President Butcher is putting together another survey to membership to request written response on club functions.
4. President Butcher will contact CBAR to check on dates of Sept 20 th, to see if open for possible fundraiser ride (in conjunction with Fall Clinic and Judges training).

Meeting adjourned 9:17

DEADLINE FOR SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER NEWSLETTER IS AUGUST **1ST**