

# The American Association of Riding Schools®



8375 E. Coldwater Road  
Davison, Michigan 48423-8966  
810-496-0360  
colleenpace@ucanride.com

**Your AARS  
Partnership**



[www.ucanride.com](http://www.ucanride.com)

## How Do Outsiders See Us?

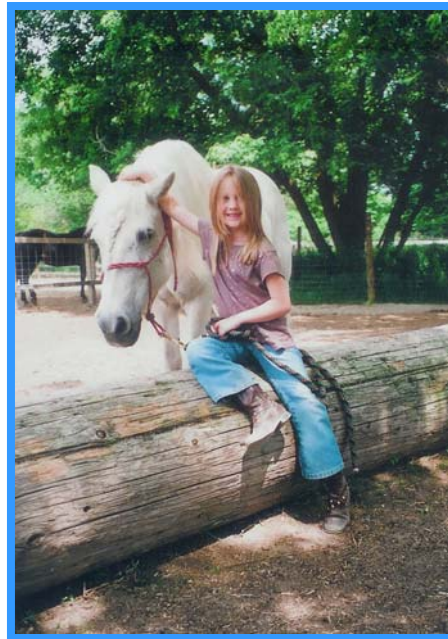
Imagine a mother saying, “My daughter is five-years-old. I think she’s ready for school. My friend’s daughter started elementary school, and she really likes it. On the other hand, my husband’s friend teaches at the junior college, so we have an inside contact there. But, come to think of it, there is a middle school halfway between work and home. If my husband drops her off, I can pick her up on my way home from work. I think we’ll do that!” Sounds awfully silly, doesn’t it? But, that’s exactly how outsiders approach the horse industry. They just can’t seem to find the front door.

Horse industry professionals need to think like those in the education industry. Elementary school teachers do not wish they were university professors; and professors don’t pretend elementary school teachers don’t exist. There is an easy-to-see system that works from the bottom up. As students move through the system, some drop out at each next-level. Everyone starts kindergarten; most finish high school; some go to college; and a minority finish a graduate degree. In the horse industry, novices enter by chance, somewhere, anywhere, along the learning progression. The result is a majority who drop out. A large part of the remainder continue through their riding years with incomplete and/or incorrect knowledge of what it takes to build a honest relationship with their horse.

In order to describe a *from-the-bottom-up* marketing initiative, I’d like to first say something about franchising. In the early 1990’s, after graduating the University of Michigan-Flint, I began independently studying franchise business models. Day care centers, recreation and fitness clubs, and extreme sports were all using franchise models to standardize their systems; making it possible for them to grow into very visible national play-

ers. I'm not saying the AARS is a franchise system; though I think it would be a very good one. People feel comfortable doing business with 'apparently organized, branded businesses.'

What makes franchising work is its ability to pare a concept down to the very basics so it can be easily duplicated. That's where a nationwide marketing program can be affordable, because so many people are using it. You might say, "How can we duplicate anything in the horse industry when everyone is trying so hard to be seen as different-than-the-next-trainer?" Well, we can - if we pare it way down. And, that's what we've done with the AARS. Super basic English, super basic western, super basic horse and stable care. So, it can serve as a super-simple foundation for your program - no matter your preferred breed or riding style - and so it can be super-simply understood by non-horse-owning beginners.



Using the AARS system to support novice riders could be your *entire* business. If you work with both beginners and advanced riders, the AARS would simply support the first half of your business. It is a model that will work for any of us who truly enjoy working with new-horse-owning and non-horse-owning beginners; in addition to whatever else we do.

The business model for the AARS garnered the Western and English Trade Association's *Best New Product* award. One judge said it looked like the closest thing to a Welcome Wagon® the industry had ever seen; and another said it looked like a department store window to our industry. This is a photo of me receiving the award from the then-reigning Miss Rodeo Queen (I'm the chemo-bald one - toss those memories).

A Welcome Wagon® approach to the horse industry - that's what a *from-the-bottom-up* approach is. But, how does it work? First, we encapsulate a program that attracts first-time riders specifically. Then, we offer a broad-based general education. That means no restrictive breeds or specialized riding styles - just a broad education about all of them.



## The AARS Philosophy

I'd like to start with a brief discussion about how the horse industry should treat its non-horse-owning novices. We could learn something from Martha Stewart. Horse trainers are like caterers; both presumably at the top of the service chain. When Martha began teaching people to cook, professional caterers said she would put them out of business. But, Martha proved that the more a person learns about cooking, the more time and money they will spend on cooking. And, from that enlarged group of enthusiasts will come more people who will likely enlist the services of a caterer. Like-

wise in the horse industry. When I asked to be taught how to clip, or how to hitch, I was told that was what trainers were for. Those responses were condescending. The intention was to make me feel small and remain dependent. No one wants to be made to feel like they will never be good enough. And, no one wants to be told they can't learn something; especially when they're paying for it. Customers can later decide whether they want to pay a caterer for perfect entertainment, or a trainer for a better crack at a ribbon.

Many parents have learned how easy it is to enroll a child in hockey or gymnastics without realizing how quickly they will be swept up into an all-consuming and too-expensive-for-them experience. You and I know horse showing is much the same. It's easy to understand why an adult or a family would shy away from riding lessons; fearing they would be responsible for a horse they never planned to own. One of our AARS tag lines is, *'You don't need to own a horse; you can fall in love with ours!'* This slogan assures the prospective customer that they can come to an AARS stable without worrying that they may be railroaded into premature horse ownership. During our pre-enrollment stable tour (described elsewhere), we tell our visitors that they will do everything with the horses that we do - except give them shots, or drive them off in a trailer. The AARS program booklets, and the ribbons and certificates that support them, help us accomplish that. These booklets do not tell an instructor how to teach. As an example of not imposing on your teaching methods, one requirement says, "I hold the reins correctly and with proper tension for western riding." An instructor schooled on Arabians would teach this differently than an instructor schooled on Quarter Horses. It doesn't matter. Each page has a number of accomplishments; and a place for the instructor to initial when that goal has been met. Upon page completion, a ribbon and/or certificate is requested via your private [www.ucanrideinstructor.com](http://www.ucanrideinstructor.com) website. A nationally-recognized, highly-personalized award is printed and sent for presentation to your rider. We find that both young and adult riders value their awards.



The check-offs in the booklets ensure that you and/or your instructors cover all the basics. Their initial endorses that they have done their job - that the junior rider has been exposed at the level at which she is able; or that the senior rider has become independently competent with that task.

Historically, two-thirds of our riders are young girls, and one-third are adult women. We know they value the AARS customer service products. We see pictures of senior rider ribbons tacked to office bulletin boards, and parents are asking for some system for displaying the junior certifi-

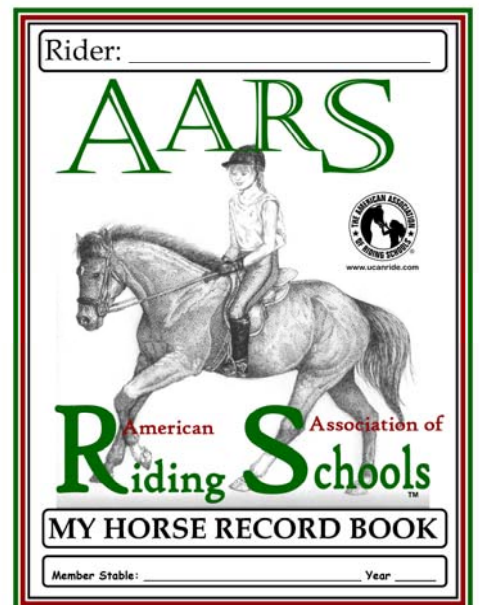
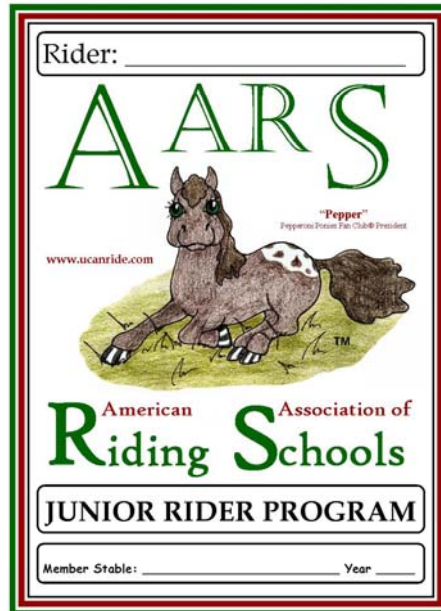
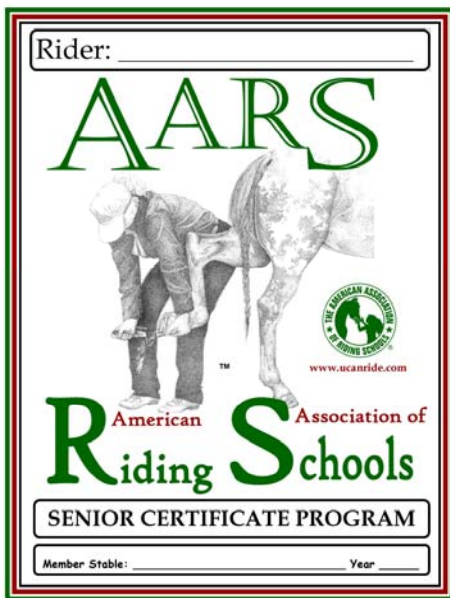




cates on bedroom walls. We've been to graduation open houses where the certificates line the wall behind the cake; and, in one case, a picture of a schooling horse *on the cake*. A schooling horse *she did not even own was the most important thing for her graduation cake...*

It is easy to help a non-horse-owner feel *at-home*. And, for many riders who are not ready to purchase, this bonding can keep them in your barn for years. A once-weekly, one-hour lesson contributes approximately \$1,920 to annual gross. Novice level schooling horses do not work hard. One good

schooling horse can secure up to \$30,000 in annual gross income; while you are feeding and caring for just one horse.



### Ancillary Programs

I went downtown Flint, Michigan to see Santa arrive. Out of the crowd, a professionally-dressed woman called, "I know you! Sara's picture is on my desk!" It was a copy of the photo you see at the right. Sara is the Haflinger; and I had sent the woman the photo on the cover of a Send-Out-Card®. The woman proceeded to tell *strangers* in the crowd about her *Day with Horses* at Riverbank Farm. I handed out brochures.

Over 7,000 riders have completed the three-hour-long *AARS Day with Horses* program at our stable. At forty dollars per hour, that would be \$280,000 - not from



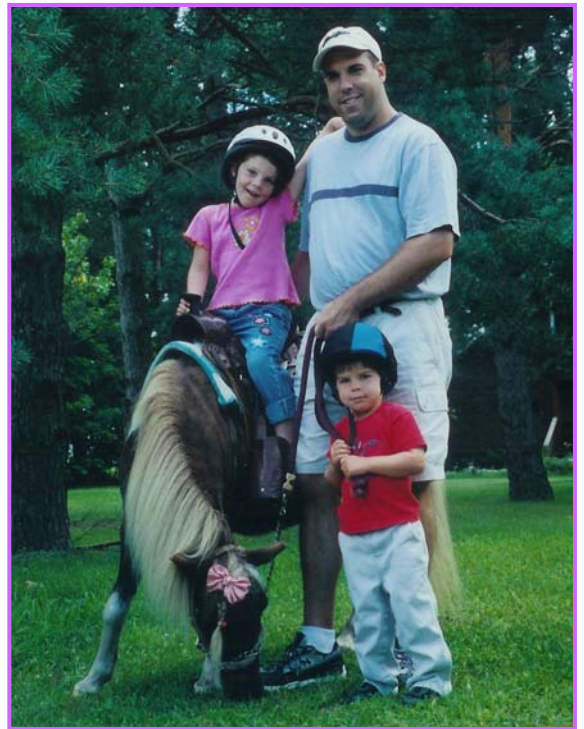
our lesson program - but, from one of our *ancillary* programs.

(*Ancillary: subordinate, helping*) I think that offering long-term, private instruction is one of the most rewarding careers a person could have. The relationships that come of it last years after the students are gone and grown; and the adult riders become life-time personal friends. But, I am not just an instructor; I am a small business owner. I learn what people need and, within reasonable boundaries, I provide it. My riding lessons provide my *income base*. My ancillary programs add a great deal of money to that base.

One-time-programs provide one-time income. And, most participants don't return. But, some come back the following year; and some enroll in private lessons. Some parents will return a couple years later with their younger child, or a sister's child. Some children will come back, maybe not to your stable, *two decades from now* because you once offered them a *Day with Horses*.

An instructor once told me she would not offer pony rides because it would prostitute her certification. Her concern was image. She did not want her stable to look like a novice-level facility. That's okay. On the other hand, the father in this picture gave me fifty dollars because he wanted a half-hour for *each* of his children. You can see that Pasghetti worked hard to earn that money.

An *AARS RuntRider™* is a child too young for lessons. Some come just once; some once a year; some every week but only in the summer. Some *size up* to the Junior Rider Program when they are ready to impose some level of expectation on their pony.



From an industry standpoint, mothers are going to enroll their three-year-olds in *something*. Once they are financially and socially indoctrinated in dance, karate, or gymnastics, there's a far lesser chance that they will cross over to horses when the child is old enough for lessons. For this reason alone, the advanced horse industry should encourage novice-level instructors to court this market by providing free support materials.

Public riding stables are becoming a thing of the past. For the most part, they are not good for horses; and they are not a gateway to our industry. But, hundreds of thousands of people could enjoy a more rewarding hands-on day with horses, if they knew the option was

available. They would contribute millions of dollars to our member stables and to our industry. The three-hour-long AARS Day with Horses™ program is our chance to encourage greenhorns to touch more than just the seat of a saddle; and to get our industry's promotional materials into the hands of the non-horse-owning public. None of us wants to deal with the caller looking for a riding stable where they can run the horses. But, aside from the 'go-kart crowd,' none of us wants to turn away business. The AARS core materials are a base from which you can serve your novice-level riding lesson programs; pony program; and one-day and multi-day programs for scouts, birthdays, anniversaries, and camps. Consistently applying the core programs and materials to individual customer needs becomes a financially efficient, time efficient, low-stress, low-prep process. And, when the telephone rings, you will be surprised at how little business you will need to turn away.



### The ucanride Website

We are not going to say a lot about the ucanride website here, because it will undergo a major update during the first half of 2015. Part of what is there now is described below.

The [Riding Programs](#) depicted on the Home Page and on the Riding Programs page are important for you, because they tell the reader what they can expect to find at your stable.

The [Member Stables](#) tab identifies the nearest AARS® member. Unlike other initiatives or websites, you will *not* have to purchase ad space on *ucanride*. It is your site.

The [Before Your Ride or Buy](#) button leads the reader to a copy of our main marketing piece: *HORSES ~ The Hobby You Can Hug!* This free download is the horse industry's most basic and easy-to-understand introduction to *how the sport and hobby of horses works*. We tend to get so caught up in describing what we find most enamoring about horses, that we forget our potential customer does not know the difference between *purebred* and *Thoroughbred*, or *registered* and *grade*. This is also a completely free marketing piece for you. When you finish a telephone conversation with a potential client, you can offer to e-mail them a free copy of this booklet. You can download a copy of the booklet directly onto your desktop, and forward it from there. This is also a friendly way to secure the caller's e-mail address for future communications.

The AARS [Online Retail Store](#) is another profit center for you. Not only do your clients receive a ten-percent discount on their purchases (a selling point for your business), but you receive a ten-percent rebate on anything they buy.

## Is the AARS a Good Fit for You?

In case you are wondering whether your physical facility is suitable, we are including here some simple photos of my simple stable. The gray 60' x 120' indoor arena has six box stalls at one end, that open directly into the 60' x 95' riding area. I also have an outdoor arena. The 20' x 25' little red barn is heated and houses my classroom/tackroom. The plywood cabinets house my DVD player, library, extra helmets, etc. There are not many stables smaller than mine; and there is nothing fancy here.

We have received queries from stable owners/instructors who ride only English (or Western). Usually, we find they have had, sometime in the past, experience in the other; and are capable of teaching it at the novice level - if they wanted. If you've not ridden *the other*, I suspect you could learn in a short period of time; at least well enough to pass novice-level certification. After all, you are, in general, a competent rider. (A social science major teaching psychology, could teach introductory sociology if she wanted to make the effort.)



We will help you to operate your business legally with regard to bookkeeping, hiring employees, and paying taxes. We know there are jokes about the horse industry being comprised only of tax shelters and under-the-table operations. But, like improvements in the daycare industry over the last two decades, we believe that incorporating better business practices in your lesson business will result in better rewards for you. So, communicate with us often. Send any question you want to [colleenpace@ucanride.com](mailto:colleenpace@ucanride.com). The more questions we receive, the better we will be able to learn what is most needed by most stable owners.

Finally, it is really important that you come in as a contributing member. Use the lesson booklets, and award ribbons and certificates. Offer the *Day with Horses™* program for scout troops and the general public. Promote the AARS logo products to your customers.

As you grow your business, you will help us take the American Association of Riding Schools to all the non-horse-owning, horse-crazy adults and kids in all fifty of our states. In return, we will work hard to help you be profitable in your endeavor.

Most sincerely,

Colleen Pace, AARS



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