

Published September 2nd, 2009

Horses not just for Cowboys

Bottomley Farm hosts Quadrille Coming Out

Submitted by Kristi Buck



left to right: Bibi Koch (16) Berkeley, on Lila; Tory Hummer (16) Orinda, on Buckwheat; Becca Buck (10) Lafayette, on Shasta; Meg Dowley (16) Lafayette, on Micah; Sally Bruce (12) Lafayette, on Clint; Cami Brisbo (19) Lafayette, on Sylvester
Photo Ohlen Alexander

team - Cami Brisbo, Sally Bruce, Becca Buck, Meg Dowley, Tory Hummer and Bibi Koch, it was not just another day at the barn. These local girls have practiced several days a week all summer to prepare for their coming out. Decked out in their team colors of black and white, the six riders and their horses performed two "tests" with grace and precision for a crowd of more than 100.

Equal credit must be given to the four legged friends. The Bottomley horses are an impressive if not eclectic team. Leading the herd was the barn's schoolmaster Buckwheat, followed by Shasta, a Quarter Horse formerly used for western riding, Sylvester a rescued Mustang, Micah the Arabian, Clint a high-stepping Thoroughbred, Chance a Paint/Arab cross, and Lila the little black pony.

Bottomley operates on "horse time." Everything is done with a simple purpose - to provide a healthy, safe and enriching environment for the horses and their humans. Bottomley is known for its unique combination of horsemanship and dressage. The students develop their horsemanship by devoting equal time to their ground work and their riding. Burt firmly believes, "there is no dressage without horsemanship and no horsemanship without dressage." It is this guiding principle that has led to a mutual respect between the horses and their humans. Burt's goal is to teach students to be "horse people, not just riders."

Burt has over 18 years experience teaching lower-level dressage and horsemanship in the San Francisco Bay Area. She is certified by the American Riding Instructor's Association, she has published numerous articles on horsemanship, and she was named one of America's top 50 riding instructors in 2007 by American Riding Instructor's Association.

Ask any Lamorinda family how they spent their summer and you'll hear the usual mix of sports including, swim team, water polo, club soccer, golf and baseball. But for those willing to venture just outside the Lamorinda border a whole other world awaits -- the realm of classical dressage and horsemanship. Dressage is an equestrian sport that encompasses both training and competitive elements to accentuate a horse's natural athletic ability. To pursue this sport one need to go no further than the hills of Briones, just behind Orinda, where you'll find numerous equestrian stables. Among those stables is Bottomley Farm, home to the Bottomley Bombshells Quadrille Team. To the uninitiated, a Quadrille is a choreographed synchronized dressage ride, commonly performed to music. It is often compared to an equestrian ballet or drill team. Four horses are used to perform in unison, although many teams have more than four participants so that alternates are always available. Quadrille may be ridden as a performance or as a competitive test with judging. Either way, it is a thrill to watch.

This past Sunday, under the keen eye of trainer, Corinne Burt, the Bottomley Bombshells gave a debut performance for family and friends in order to prepare them for formal competition this fall. To the members of the Bombshells

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