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Keep horsing around with the help of these local equestrian shops

By John T. Miller



ReactorPanel Saddle Company. Photos John T. Miller

Three saddlery, tack, and bridle stores, with three different stories, have been created in the Lamorinda area to serve the robust equestrian community here.

Horsing Around

The first to arrive on the scene, the Orinda Village Horse Shop, was opened in 1995 by owner Linda Englestad. With a motto of "Everything for the horse and rider," Englestad has fashioned an independent, locally owned shop that can respond to requests and local needs.

The business was originally called "Horsing Around," but a dispute over naming rights led the local company to change its name.

"This shop has been a part of the community for so long that we are familiar with the local barns, trainers, and riding programs offered," said Englestad. "Being a locally owned shop, we are able to easily adapt to requests or local needs."

Originally, the company focused only on English riding, which is the type featured in the Olympics and includes Hunter/Jumping, Dressage and Endurance. Last year, however, they expanded into Western style, which includes Rodeo, Pleasure Reining, and Trail. They also introduced a consignment program recently for customers to resell merchandise.

The company especially focuses on helping new riders and also carries items for the horse lover who may not ride.

A Patented Leather Saddle

Tucked into a small office space in the Moraga Executive Plaza, the ReactorPanel Saddle Company provides quality saddles to local riders, customers all over the United States, and some international clients.

Carmi Weininger bought the saddle business in 1999 from an English company, and has developed a product unlike any other.

While some of the buyers are local, most of the sales go to customers across the United States, and a handful of saddles are sold internationally. Using video links, the staff can custom fit the saddle to the new owner's needs.

Weininger says, "With the touch of a button, I can be working in Virginia in the morning, Colorado in the afternoon, and Tennessee in the evening." The company won't sell a saddle without a two-week trial. "We have technology for a remote fitting all over the globe."

The company is working on a new name -- since many think something nuclear is implied by the Reactor part of the current logo. More importantly, the local group is about to patent a new flapless saddle they helped develop for an endurance rider.

"We found that women in their 50s and 60s had a better sense of connection to their horses without the flap," said Weininger. "After a further study, we found the heart rates of the horses were lower without the flap." The company has decided to delay release of the product until it is patented.

The saddle is for English-style riding, but the newly developed flapless version fills the niche market for endurance riding. "These competitions are like ultra marathons," said Weininger, "with the horses traveling over 100 miles."

Commenting on the local equestrian scene, Weininger said, "The area is rich and deep with riders. Moraga is a great central location to reach them."

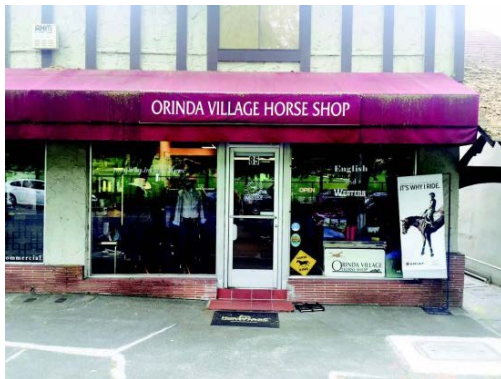
New Colt on the Block

While Dover Saddlery is a relative newcomer to the area, moving into the Moraga Shopping Center in the fall of 2015, the parent company was established in Wellesley, Massachusetts, in 1974 by the Power brothers. The Moraga store is the second West Coast location after Laguna Hills, and the next closest is in Colorado.

Current manager Tracy Burke has been with the Dover Saddlery for 12 years and helps open new locations for the company. After receiving a law degree in Massachusetts, she decided to work for Dover instead: "Dover was my go to tack store while growing up, and then became my undergrad job. After I passed the bar I decided I'd rather work for them than be a lawyer."

The store serves English-style riding and also has veterinarian medicines, supplements, horse care products and basic barn supplies. They sell their own makes of saddles, including Circuit and Warendorf, and carry about 10 other brands of saddles.

Burke is here temporarily doing training and looking to hire a new permanent manager. "I am amazed at how tight-knit the horse community is here and how well they support each other," she said. "Everyone is invested in the community (of riders), helping the equestrian scene flourish."



Orinda Village Horse Shop.



Dover Saddlery.

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