

Tanglewood Farm offering classes on handling miniature horses

Sunday, August 15, 2004 1:59 AM EDT

[E-mail this story](#) | [Printable Version](#)

By Donna Harris

Cherokee Tribune Staff Writer

Call them miniature versions of Roy Rogers and Dale Evans.

Cowboys and cowgirls ages 5 to 15 can get a firsthand glimpse into life in the Old West in Cowpoke classes at Tanglewood Farm in Macedonia.

The one-day class teaches young cowpokes how to handle miniature horses.



"They learn how to brush and groom the horses and lead them properly," said owner Michelle Bolt. "They start on the obstacle course, and the obstacle course has jumps and bridges and barrels and cones."

The classes, which started six years ago, help youngsters feel more comfortable around horses, Ms. Bolt said.

"A lot of kids just don't get a chance to participate with horses," she said. "Children aren't as threatened with little horses, so it really builds their confidence. And it gives them an idea of what a horse trainer might participate in with their horses - only on a smaller level and younger mentality."

Many parents register their children for the class as a precursor to their taking riding lessons.

Stephanie Kessler of Kennesaw said her 5-year-old daughter, Lauren, who recently took the class, wants to take horseback riding lessons but hasn't had any experience with the large creatures.

"When we go to the fair or somewhere, she loves being around the horses, but she's a little bit afraid of them," Mrs. Kessler said. "I thought being around horses that were smaller in size would be good exposure for her and give her more confidence to take horseback riding lessons when she gets a little older. I'm still thinking she needs to be about 8."

And her reasoning was right on track.

"Lauren loved it, absolutely loved it," said Mrs. Kessler, adding they have every intention of repeating the "very, very enjoyable experience" next year. "She had so much fun and was so proud of herself for handling the horses. She's very shy, and this gave her a lot of confidence."

During the first part of class, the cowpokes mingle with the tiny horses before choosing the one they want to handle.

"They go in with the herd of horses and pet them and get to know them," Ms. Bolt said. "That's how they pick their miniature horse."

Once they're paired up, the youngsters learn grooming techniques, handling commands and the obstacle course, which they practice for an hour.

"This definitely helps us out with training so the kids are real trainers," she said, noting she begins using horses in the class when they're a month old. "The horses are so trusting, and they really are so easy to train. They're more like a big dog."

Getting the horses successfully through the maze of bridges, cones, jumps and barrels in the obstacle course is "trial and error," Ms. Bolt said.

"The horse might go over the bridge or it might not," she said. "In one case, one of the horses (16-inch Tiny Bubbles) was so tiny, the participant had to carry her over the bridge. You never know when the horse is going to lay down or jump higher than their height."

Around midday, the cowpokes take a break to eat lunch and to make a craft, which changes each week, she said. One craft is a Buckaroo Bucket, a 5-gallon paint bucket with a seat on top that they decorate.

After lunch and craft time, the kids prepare for the horse parade for their parents at the end of class.

They spend 40 minutes choosing a costume and dressing up their horses and taking them on a refresher walk through the obstacle course.

"The horses have a huge wardrobe," Ms. Bolt said, noting some costumes include an angel, princess, fairy, bride, hula girl and clown. "In October, we're usually the first ones shopping for costumes, not for children to go trick or treating but for the horses for our cowpoke classes."

Lauren, a kindergartner at Vaughan Elementary in west Cobb, chose a Hawaiian outfit for her horse, Sugar, but didn't use the grass skirt.

"Sometimes we have a hard time keeping the horses from eating it," Ms. Bolt said, laughing.

Lauren's friend, Kelsey Daugherty, 7-year-old daughter of Jamie and Christie Daugherty of Kennesaw, decided to dress up Sugar Foot as a clown.

Ms. Bolt said some of the kids also dress up and often come up with cute names for them and their horses like Bride and Groomer.

At 1 p.m., their parents are treated to a parade and introduction of horses in the arena, and each cowpoke leads his or her horse through the obstacle course to compete for the blue ribbon.

"The kids take this very seriously," Ms. Bolt said, noting the competition is based on accuracy, not speed. "Usually everybody gets a ribbon, but some kids might all get first place if it's an exceptional group."

After the awards have been presented, the kids introduce their parents to the horses, take the miniatures to the barn and walk their moms and dads through the Wild West Town to see the rest of the animals.

"By this time, the kids are so confident in what they're doing," Ms. Bolt said.

dharris@cherokeetribune.com