



[Anthony Dimaano / The Bulletin](#)

Victoria Hellmers, 10, of Bend, rides her horse, Diego, over poles in the trail contest Sunday at Healing Reins Therapeutic Riding Center in Bend. About three dozen riders competed in the third annual Spring Fling Horse Show.

A chance to share 'what they can do'

C.O. program for challenged riders hosts its spring show

By [Heather Clark / The Bulletin](#)

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Judging by the radiant smiles, tiny hands waving to the crowd and focused determination, the Spring Fling Horse Show at Healing Reins Therapeutic Riding Center in southeast Bend brought out memorable riding performances from participants who competed on Sunday.

Even a thunderstorm that halted the event's outdoor trail competition couldn't dampen the riders' excitement at showing their horses, not only in front of a watchful judge, but an audience of spectators as well.

The third annual event included some three dozen physically and/or mentally disabled riders who rotated between 11 different horses.

Sunday's competitors have been training regularly for as long as four years or as few as eight weeks at the therapeutic riding center.

Healing Reins is an equestrian program for riders - who are either physically or mentally challenged, or both - to learn the skills of riding a horse, and to eventually reach independence at the walk, trot and canter.

The Spring Fling is part of a twice-yearly opportunity for those riders to demonstrate their equestrian skills for family and friends. At the same time, the show is an opportunity for riders to experience the thrill of competition.

A crowd of spectators along with legions of volunteers were on hand Sunday to root for the riders as they performed in a variety of English equitation classes at Healing Reins' indoor arena while trail classes were held in the outdoor arena (later moved to the indoor arena when a thunderstorm blew in).

While some equestrians competed in classes for independent riders - directing their horse at the walk, trot or canter around the arena or through trail obstacles without assistance - others utilized the help of volunteers to lead their horse.

Spectators cheered as winners of blue, red and white ribbons were announced, followed by beaming smiles and high-fives.

Marsha Williams of Bend served as judge for the Spring Fling, and she noted that the classes were most challenging to place.

"What I'm looking for mainly is how they (the riders) can control their posture, and turn their horse around while staying balanced," said Williams, a dressage rider who has judged mounted drill team and dressage schooling shows. "(I'm judging on) their general attitude and presentation. It's really (judged) on the person and not on the horse."

Riders circled the arena at a walk during the equitation classes and were asked to demonstrate their skills at changing directions, trotting and halting. Horses and riders then lined up in front of the show's audience, where they backed their horses and answered questions from the judge.

"It's funny, he's kinda scared of a lot of things," said Val Grindstaff of Redmond, whose 7-year-old son Damon took first-place honors aboard Diego in the walk/trot independent and independent trail classes. "But he's not scared of a great big horse."

Sunday was Damon's third horse show, said his mother, who noted that riding horses at Healing Reins has helped her son learn to focus and follow directions.

Healing Reins program director Penny Campbell said including competition in the riders' training routine is another way of teaching independence.

"We feel like it's a chance for the riders to demonstrate to the public what they've learned," said Campbell, "and exposing them to all the areas of the horse world. Competition is an important part of learning how to ride."

Campbell noted that at the show, riders work on proper English equitation posture - even performing a two-point position (rising out of the saddle while bent slightly forward) - along with demonstrating control of their horse at various gaits.

"Some of these kids have never had a chance to compete in anything," noted Campbell. "They're sharing with people what they can do, and having a blast."

But not all the riders on Sunday were kids.

In her mid-60s, Ann Goldberg, a white-haired rider outfitted with English breeches, was the oldest competitor at the show.

"I love it," said Goldberg following her walk/trot class. Goldberg maintained a calm demeanor as her horse, Hobo, jittered and pranced with fear during her equitation class when a loud roll of thunder and pouring rain pounded the arena's metal roof about midday. Not 30 minutes later, Goldberg was back on Cece, directing the horse through trail obstacles, where she took second place.

"It's fun to do this," she said, "and see how you've done a little better each year."

Heather Clark can be reached at 617-7868 or at [hclark@ bendbulletin.com](mailto:hclark@bendbulletin.com).