



OEF EQUINEWS

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Western riding is picking up speed.

First Western Riding Coach receives the Ontario Equestrian Federation Coach of the Year Distinction

Fast on the heels of the Canadian Reiners' gold and silver medal victories at the 2006 FEI World Equestrian Games, Freelton Ontario's western riding coach, Jennifer McIlwraith, was selected as top coach in 2006 for the Ontario Equestrian Federation (OEF).



Freelton-based Jennifer McIlwraith wins 2006 OEF Honour

Jennifer McIlwraith, head coach and co-owner of Double J Farms was selected from among a number of nominated coaches as the 2006 OEF Coach of the Year.

"Our selection committee was particularly impressed by Jennifer McIlwraith's credentials. She exemplifies the attributes of the award criteria to a T," said OEF Executive Director, Marcia Barrett.

"The Ontario Equestrian Federation Coach of the Year award is bestowed on an Equine Canada-certified coach who demonstrates appreciation for a positive influence toward the discipline's participants; shares knowledge and insight about the discipline with his/her students; believes in and practices ethical conduct in the barn, the arena and at a show; has positive enthusiasm and dedication for the discipline; demonstrates coaching ability through the success of his/her students in the discipline; and promotes all equine matters in which he/she believes," Barrett explained further.

"This is an important milestone in the equestrian world," said Lori Betts, President of the Western Horse Association of Ontario (WHAO). "This is the first time a western riding discipline coach has been recognized as an outstanding mentor within the equestrian arena. This award reflects an increasing understanding of the high level of skill and teamwork required by western performance riding," she continued.

About Jennifer McIlwraith – Partnership builder

A veteran of the horse business before she was even thirty years old, Jennifer has competed at the national level, winning the Reserve Canadian National Champion title. Now as a coach and horse trainer, she focuses on building and mentoring great partnerships between horse and rider teams, leading to safety and rider satisfaction as well as the achievement of results. Her students progress quickly and well.

McIlwraith offers instruction and rider certification, coach mentoring and show team development, as well as horses for sale and boarding. She caters best to goal-oriented learners, sharing her love of everything equine with students young and not-so-young and with people at different levels of experience and ability.

“McIlwraith is particularly deserving of this Coach of the Year award. She has trained many young and aspiring students and horses to high point levels within their respective events, one such student being the 2005 and 2006 High Point Youth Western Performance Champion for the Western Horse Association of Ontario,” added the WHAO President.

Why Jennifer McIlwraith chose and promotes Western riding

Western riding is the dominant choice of riders in the US with some 80% of people estimated to ride in the western style. In Canada, English riding is more developed. So, unlike many of her local peers, Jennifer chose the way less ridden when she opted for the western discipline.

“Because of its practical history, western riding develops the basic skills most casual riders need to enjoy their horse in a relaxed and safe way,” says McIlwraith.

“It’s a discipline that’s really well-suited for early or new riders,” she explains. “Initially, the larger saddle provides more support and is more forgiving. That’s why trail riding is usually offered to the public in western-saddled horses. But later, western riding helps hone other, much more advanced riding skills that are great for the rider *and* for the horse:

- Balance with a relaxed seat, legs, body and reins
- Speed and steering with the seat and legs, sparing the horse’s mouth
- Control with one-hand
- “Collection” of the horse and responsiveness gains that come from having “rear wheel drive”
- Mastery of smooth gaits at a variety of speeds
- Confident execution of real-life maneuvers such as backing-up, turns in tight quarters, side-passes & other lateral moves, crossing bridges and water-ways and other challenges horse and riders encounter when they’re out for a hack.”

McIlwraith hopes more people will discover the thrill of western riding, appreciate its precision and get out and enjoy some relaxing, soul-fulfilling bonding time with these amazing creatures we call horses.

Why McIlwraith supports certification for riders and mentors aspiring Instructors & Coaches

McIlwraith’s motto is: “Be the most informed, intelligent rider you can be. And enjoy.” And she writes about the value of becoming certified as a Rider, Instructor or Coach in her recent article, “10 Secrets For Having More Fun With Your Horse”, published in the April 2007 issue of **WHOA!**, the official newsletter of the Ontario Equestrian Federation.

“The benefits of becoming a certified Instructor or Coach are probably obvious to most people. The increased knowledge and credibility that derive from meeting an objective, national standard are pretty clear, but many people might overlook the great value of pursuing **rider** certification,” McIlwraith offers.

“We shouldn’t be fooled by the program name of *“Learn to Ride,”* Mcllwraith cautions. “This program starts with the basics but sees riders through some relatively advanced skill development and horse-related knowledge,” she says.

The Equine Canada *Learn To Ride* program is based a National standard, providing a framework for learning and feedback that any rider and Coach in the country can use to stage safe skill and knowledge development.

“There’s a lot to learn with horses and the Equine Canada *Learn to Ride* program is a fantastic, progressive approach that helps students become consistent, trustworthy and knowledgeable riders, horse handlers and owners. It’s motivating for the rider. It’s motivating for the horse. And it helps keep everyone safe,” Mcllwraith adds.

“Most of my students are working on their rider certification levels and many aspire to coach or instruct in the future. Rider certification accelerates their knowledge and confidence and is a pre-requisite to instruct or coach. It clearly increases the overall quality of western horsemanship and horse care. And, hopefully, it’s also a way to introduce more people to the western discipline,” says Mcllwraith.

Why take western riding lessons?

Mcllwraith encourages new riders to start off right by working with a certified Instructor or Coach. “This could save you spills and a lot of frustration,” she observes.

And, of course, she offers that more experienced riders can benefit with a tune-up of their skills, especially as they start show season, or if they just want to identify and work on fixing some old habits.

“Mastery is a process and every rider can learn something new. Instruction makes a huge difference. Clearly, the more we know, the more enjoyment both horse and rider will get from the partnership,” says Mcllwraith.

There are over 200 Equine Canada Certified Western Coaches in Ontario. Fifty-three (53) are actively coaching in the southern part of the province serving the area codes 905, 519, 416, and 705.

Double J Farms— Mcllwraith’s operation & training facility— is conveniently located between GTA/Mississauga, Hamilton, Guelph and Cambridge/KW. Jennifer Mcllwraith can be reached via her website at www.doublej farms.ca or by calling 905.659.2792.

Available:

- Jennifer Mcllwraith Profile & Testimonials. <http://www.doublej farms.ca/jennifer.html>
- PDF article: **10 Secrets For Having More Fun With Your Horse, *WHOA!*** April 2007 by Jennifer Mcllwraith with Toni Ritchie

Photos:



Jennifer Mcllwraith, Reserve National Champion (2000) and 2006 OEF Coach of the Year Photo CREDIT: Carol Mooney



Maegan Nagy, 2006 High Point Youth Rider, Rockton Saddle Club & Reserve High Point Rider, Dunville Saddle Club. Photo CREDIT: River Bend Designs



Ashley Orton, 2006 High Point Novice Rider for Ancaster and Rockton Saddle Clubs & Ancaster's Champion Novice Western Trail Rider. **Trail picture:** Photo CREDIT: M Barr, M Photography,



Jennifer McIlwraith encourages her students to wear approved safety helmets. Photo CREDIT: Carol Mooney



Cary Warren, NRHA reining judge and rider. Photo CREDIT: River Bend Designs



Stephanie Robson, Robson Barrel Horses.



Samantha Betts, 2005 and 2006 High Point Youth Western Performance Champion, Western Horse Association of Ontario (WHAO). Photo CREDIT: River Bend Designs

For more information

- For more information on the Canadian Reining team visit: www.nrha.on.ca
- For more information on the Rider, Instructor and Coach certification programs visit www.horse.on.ca/programs/rider_level/western_learn_to_ride_program.html OR contact OEF's Education Coordinator, Catherine Barker at education@horse.on.ca or call 1.877.441.7112

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The Ontario Equestrian Federation is the umbrella organization dedicated to equine welfare, and to providing leadership and support to individuals, associations and industries in Ontario's horse community.
"Striding for Equine Excellence"