

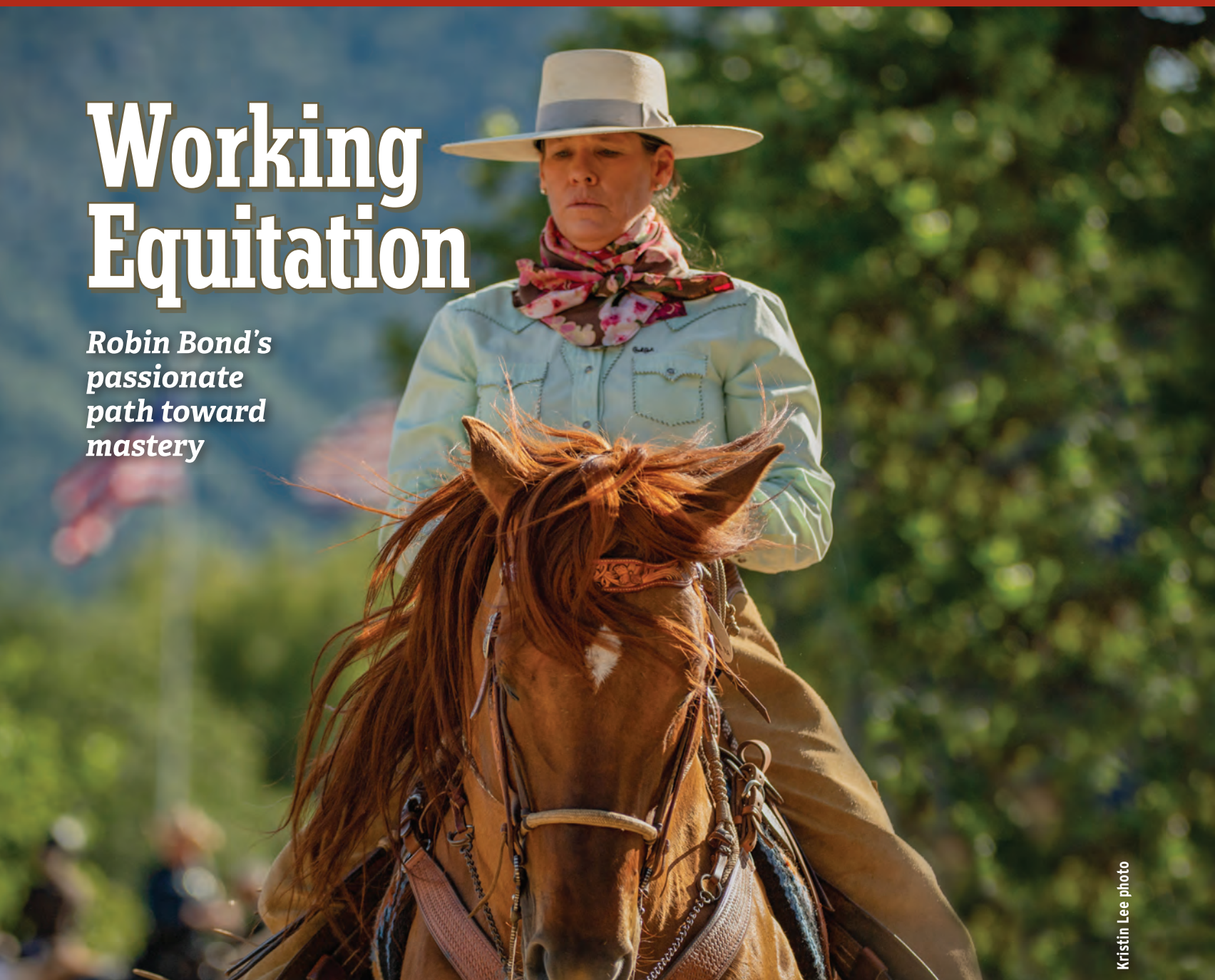
California *Horsetrader*

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Working Equitation

*Robin Bond's
passionate
path toward
mastery*



Kristin Lee photo

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Working Equitation has captured trainer Robin Bond's passion and dedication.



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Another Level

Trainer Robin Bond's background, personality and gifts helped her discover the up-and-coming international sport of Working Equitation

BY HORSETRADER STAFF

Horsetrader: Robin, you have a rich equestrian background – from your English foundation to national reined cow horse accomplishments and many other events. Now, you've really taken to Working Equitation.

Robin: I love the challenge of Working Equitation. It's a great sport, and I think the more people who see it – and see everything that goes into it – the more people will be attracted to it.

Horsetrader: When many hear "equitation," they think of

young riders being judged on the flat going in circles. Not the case, is it?

Robin: No, it is an international sport. The four trials are dressage, ease of handling, a speed trial and a cattle trial. It's not western because the tack and attire doesn't have to be western. In the United States, it is acceptable to ride under dressage tack and attire or hunter tack and attire, or even native Spanish, Portuguese or Mexican attire. And any breed can compete – you'll see Fjords, Gypsy Cobs, Lusitanos, Quarter Horses,

Paints, Andalusians.

I know we Americans struggle a little bit with the name "equitation." In Europe, equitation does not mean what it means in the United States. Equitation in Europe means horsemanship, not the class of young girls posting a trot.

Horsetrader: How did your riding reach this point? Where did you start with horses.

Robin: The very beginning – as a very small girl in Chicago – my first horse experiences were the pony rides, and my parents couldn't drag me off of them.

Later at age 7 in Connecticut, I started riding English.

When we moved to Carlsbad, CA, I was 10, and continued the hunters and jumpers with lessons at Rancho Carlsbad, which became Ride America.

Horsetrader: What was your first horse?

I got my first horse when I was 13. We couldn't afford lessons AND a horse, so we got a horse – he was a 15-month-old Mustang stud colt. My father knew nothing about horses, and I couldn't convince him any other way. He liked this horse, and we had a friend who had a Mustang and did well with her. I said, "well it's 50 bucks, let's do this!"

The \$50 horse taught me a lot. I had no lessons, but I had a playbook – I used Podhajsky's "Complete Training of Horse and Rider." He was a master of the Spanish Riding School for a long time and wrote several books. I actually went page by page and trained my horses according to this book.

Seven years later, by the time I was 20, I had leased him to a young lady in Ramona who did the hunters with him. By that time we was doing one-tempe flying changes. They probably weren't very good, but we did them.

Horsetrader: Clearly, you were "horse-crazy."

Robin: I exhausted the Ridgefield, Conn., Public Library



USA Working Equitation
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for Working Equitation in the
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<https://usawe.org/>

UPCOMING EVENT:

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Kristin Lee photo

of every book that had the reference to the word horse in it that was available to a 9-year-old girl.

Horsetrader: And it's been non-stop horses since?

Robin: When I was 23, I joined the Navy. I had three horses at the time and leased them out.

My riding took a back seat for six years. When I got out of the Navy,

I took a year to focus on my sons, and at the end of that year I got a job teaching small children riding lessons at Sandy Arledge Quarter Horses at Far West Farms in Del Mar.

I lasted 11 months as the small children's riding instructor – not because I was bad at it or because I didn't like it -- but because, by the time I finished teaching everybody else's child how to ride, when I got to my own children I was out of patience. It wasn't fair to them. So, I moved from the kids' riding teacher to be the health tech for the farm. Sandy sent me to Colorado State University for the reproduction program. After being certified, I was the liaison with the veterinarians with broodmares, lameness exams, colics, emergency surgeries. I collected the stallions, inseminated the mares, foaled out the babies and rehabilitated horses coming back from injuries. I learned a lot.

Horsetrader: Did you train horses at Far West Farms?

Robin: I got a couple horses in

training from Sandy, some trail riding horses, and learned to ride western at Far West Farms. After I had proven myself, I started colts, learned reining and reined cowhorse. I was there for 10 years. It was a really good spot. Couldn't beat the weather, and you could ride right out the back into the canyons in those days.

Horsetrader: What did you do for the Navy?

Robin: I was an airframes and hydraulics mechanic. I repaired hydraulic systems on F-14s.

Horsetrader: What has been the path to Working Equitation?

Robin: After Far West Farms, I had a couple years at the Rancho Riding Club – a couple gentlemen there needed their horses to be kept fit for their Rancheros Visitadores ride. So I moved my business over there and opened up on my own. I did the trail riding there and worked on my reining.

My highlight at the Rancho Riding Club was the first time we developed a musical freestyle presentation for them. I did a

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reining/dressage musical freestyle and debuted it at the riding club, then I took it to the Del Mar National and showed during dinner at the Evening of Musical Freestyle.

It was an amazing night. I got to watch Debbie McDonald and Brentina. I saw Steffen Peters, right up close and personal.

Horsetrader: You and the Quarter Horse, Chapo?

Robin: I had Chapo, and I wore a Spanish hat, a short jacket. I had the black jeans – we didn't have the skirt yet – and I put crystals down the legs of the jeans to make them look a little Mexican-Spanish style. I rode to a medley of Gypsy Kings songs.

They had to pull a couple panels out of the dressage arena because the reining pattern is bigger than the dressage court. I did the reining pattern and then I did what now would be called "Western Dressage" – some four-tempe lead changes, a couple cool little dance moves, some rollbacks. Fast and slows. Some nice trot work.

So there we were, Evening of Musical Freestyles. Very knowledgeable dressage crowd.

Horsetrader: That was before freestyle reining was popular. How did it go?

Robin: Afterward the crowd was so excited. I was walking through the stands to find my mom and my dad when the head of the jury for the dressage show walked up to me and, in his German accent, said to me, "THAT is dressage!"

It was really amazing.

Horsetrader: Did that performance influence you?

Robin: I was surprised, pleased, honored. I know it was impressive – we had made it, built it, to be impressive. I wasn't surprised that people liked it, but at the time I did not understand as much as I do now about engagement, impulsion, and suspension. I was riding my reining horse, my cow horse. So, to have it technically lauded was a big boost for me. It was a springboard for me to learn more about how to make it even better. I am

a perfectionist, and I think that this particular horse, he always came alive in front of a crowd.

Horsetrader: What happened in Chapo's first Working Equitation event?

Robin: We were at Andalusian World Show, and we were surrounded by Andalusian and Lusitano horses – all the manes and tails and extravagant movement. I rode Chapo there and he was, again, exceptional. He was the high-scoring horse of the show for the working equitation division.

Horsetrader: Was musical freestyle reining a bridge to Working Equitation?

Robin: The freestyle led directly to me starting in working equitation, but the start came after one performance in particular – Project Cowgirl TV Show at Horse Expo in 2012. We finished second, but afterward, a lady named Sue Watkins, who along with a couple others wrote the first United States Working Equitation Rule Book for the Andalusian and Lusitano associ-

ation, had watched us. She saw what we did -- the trail pattern and all the other things we had to do -- and she came up and asked if I had heard of working equitation. I had seen some videos of Pedro Torres on Oxidado when I was looking for obstacles that I might see in the Extreme Cowboy Race – that was about it. Then she told me, "you should do Working Equitation because, you know, you're actually already doing it. You are working a cow. You're doing dressage. You're doing trail obstacles with style, and you're doing trail obstacles with speed. Those are the four elements of working equitation."

That was why the freestyle led directly to me starting in working equitation.

Horsetrader: Dressage. Cattle work. Trail for style. Trail for speed with obstacles. Wow. That's challenging for you and the horse. It must take patience.

Robin: It has evolved in most of the people who are doing this in the United States into a real drive for working your horse

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for soundness and longevity. Unfortunately, that is sadly lacking in American horse sports, particularly the western sports. It's not unusual to see a 16-, 17- 18-, 19-year old horse in advanced dressage, show jumping or even three-day eventing. There was a 20-year-old horse that did cross country in the last Olympics. But here we have our cutting horses and our reining horses and our reined cow horses performing in futurities when they are three. Now, you CAN have a horse that does that and you CAN keep them sound— I'm not saying that you can't — but I am saying it's harder.

Those 3-year-old horses are required to do the same elements with the same degree of competence as the 6-, 7-, 8- and 9-year old horses. I don't think that's right. Now, I did those events — I did the reined cowhorse futurity three times.

One of the things that is really interesting about the way working equitation works is how you go up through the levels. And, because of the obstacles and the cattle phase, you cannot get away with a tense horse. Sometimes if you're riding in straight dressage, you can still get pretty high marks, but your comments will say "tension," "some tension" and maybe you'll be getting 7's when if you didn't have tension you'd be getting 8's. In working equitation, the tension will tell. You can't have a horse that's tense go through the obstacles. They'll knock them over, they won't stand still.

Horsetrader: The levels are clearly defined, then.

Robin: The the tests get increasingly more difficult through the levels. For example, the jump obstacle starts with the pole on the ground at Level 1, and at Level 2 you get a small cross-rail. At Level 4 it can be a straight rail. When you get to Level 6, it's a hay bale with a bar over it.

Horsetrader: Can you give us a quick run-down of the levels?

Robin: Sure. In Introductory — Level 1 — there is a walk-trot test. They do the dressage phase and what we call the Ease of Handling — the trail for style. Just those two

events.

When you get to Novice A — Level 2 — you canter in your dressage test and you canter between the obstacles, and you also can do the speed test and the cattle trial.

Then, Novice B — Level 3 — introduces more canter, lead changes through the trot, and some of the obstacles will be cantered.

In Intermediate A — Level 4 — there are simple changes through the walk, asking horses for a lot more engagement, a lot more suppleness. We start walk pirouettes, setting your horse up to get those done.

In Intermediate B — Level 5 — are flying changes and more canter, more technical. The obstacles requirements are more difficult..

In Advanced Level — Level 6 — you have to do it all with the reins in one hand. The whole thing. You'll be disqualified if you reach up and touch the reins with your free hand for more than the time it takes to adjust them.

Masters Level is Level 7, and that's where you introduce the musical freestyle component — also in one hand.

Horsetrader: It does take time and patience!

Robin: Yes. Zapata, my current horse, is 10. He was started in 2017 and is in Intermediate B now. Five years to get to Level 5. There's a little bit of a cool "cheat" with me because I am really comfortable riding one-handed since I have ridden western horses since 1989. The difference between levels 4 through 7 is a little bit easier for me because I am already adept at riding my horses with one hand. The transition is a little bit easier than it is for people coming from a different background. They want you to get to one hand because, just like our western horses, the other hand has to open the gate, carry the garrocha, etc.

The other beautiful thing about these levels is if you don't have aspirations to show in one hand at master's level, then you go up to the level where you are comfortable — and that's good enough! Compete there — you have a good horse and you have fun doing it.



Courtesy photo

And it's exciting.

Horsetrader: Who are the people discovering Working Equitation, as you have?

Robin: This is a great event for people who are maybe tired of just doing the straight dressage and want to do something more with their fabulous dressage horse. This is really, really good cross-over event for people coming down from three-day eventing, show jumping, reining and even reined cow horse. You know, there gets a point in your age when you maybe think you don't want to go down the fence like that any more, but you still want to have that precision and the love of of speed control and everything that goes into the reined cow horse, a multi-phase event, too. The herd work, the rein work, the fence work and steer-stopping — four phases.

I think the more people who

see working equitation and see that you can do this in either your dressage saddle or your western saddle, the more people are going to be thinking that it might be pretty cool.

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