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# AMERICA'S HORSE

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*horse Q people*

# *The Century Club*

*To join, you and your horse's combined age  
must be at least 100. Meet these teams  
in a club all their own.*

By Tom Moates

Ellie Metelits and Just Enuff Sun



"PEOPLE SAY, 'YOU'RE A REAL INSPIRATION!' BECAUSE OF THE age I am, and I'm still riding," says Ellie Metelits. "And to be honest, nobody realized how old I was until I did this Century Club thing. I was just 72 in June."

Just Enuff Sun, Ellie's American Quarter Horse gelding who's better known as "Sunny," had just turned 32 when they competed together in a dressage show in March 2009 at the Florida Horse Park. Their combined age at the time added up to 103, and the ride qualified them for the Dressage Foundation's Century Club – an honor bestowed upon horse and rider pairs with a combined age of 100 or more who still compete in horse shows.

More than 70 horse and rider "teams," as they are called, currently make up the club. Thirteen of the qualified horses, around 20 percent of the club's roster, are American Quarter Horses or Quarter Horse crosses.

The Dressage Foundation is a nonprofit group established to foster support for the sport of dressage, or to put it another way, as the group frankly states in its literature: "We raise money, manage it and give it away."

The Century Club was organized in 1996, says Jenny Johnson, the foundation's administrative manager. It was the brainchild of some older riders who wanted to recognize other senior riders and horses, showcase the partnerships they enjoy, point to the longevity and fitness they exemplify and

simply show others that it is possible to have fun with horses at an older age.

There are no membership dues, and entry is just a matter of riding any level dressage test at a show under a judge (even schooling shows count) and meeting the age requirements. The Century Club members are spread out all across America, and there are no formal meetings, but an annual newsletter is produced with listings of new members.

Sometimes the "Century Rides" spark a big celebration, with family and friends giving the horse and rider flowers, and Jenny says she even has seen a qualifying horse receive a huge gift basket. It's typical to see these riders enjoying very long-term relationships with their century mounts.

"I went to see this horse with a friend of mine who wanted to buy it," Ellie remembers of how she and Sunny met 28 years ago. "He was skin and bones, and she didn't even want to try him. I said, 'Well, try him! He might have nice gaits.' So she wouldn't try him. I tried him, and he was lovely. I ended up having him vetted out, which cost more than the horse cost. (The vet) said to me that all he needed was groceries."

"At the time I didn't have my own farm, but I had him sent to where I was boarding my other horse, which was also a Quarter Horse, and we started from there. I trail rode him in the beginning. I actually bought him to do competitive trail riding. And then we bought our own farm, and we took



Norma Thiele Talburt and Lady Of Fame

him home. A friend of mine who was an equestrian instructor said to me, 'Why don't you bring him over for some dressage lessons?' So I took him over ... and that's how we got into dressage. Then we got into eventing."

Sunny was 4 years old when Ellie purchased him, and he turned 33 this month. Other than a bone chip that required surgery when he was 10, the gelding has remained completely sound and healthy over the decades.

"Nobody believes that he's in his 30s," Ellie says. "He's not sway backed at all. I've taken really good care of him. He's chiropracted and acupuncture. He's on supplements. I think the Quarter Horses are really pretty wonderful. I think their temperaments are great. When I did eventing, he just took care of me when I went over the jumps. He loves to jump."

And Ellie loves to ride.

"I'm still at it," she says. "My husband thought I'd give it up a long time ago, but it's still in my blood. We had a farm up in New Jersey. We were there for 18 years, and we're down here (in Florida) for eight years, and (Sunny) is with me. He's with me 'til the end – either his or mine," she says with a laugh. "I'm not sure which is going to go first."

### Another Member

NORMA THIELE TALBURT AND 32-YEAR-OLD LADY OF FAME, AKA "Jonie," are another team that has achieved entry into the Century Club in the opposite corner of the country. Norma lives in Roseburg, Oregon, where she was born and raised. Their Century Ride came in April 2010 at an Oregon Dressage Society-approved show in Roseburg.

"I think it's a great way to honor us older riders," Norma says. "There are some very good riders in that group that have gone up through the levels (in dressage). It was my goal for several years to do this, and finally we reached the proper age bracket. Jonie got elected to come back into the show ring and do it. She actually belongs to my daughter-in-law, and

I've kind of inherited her off-and-on for the last 15 years. I've shown her in open shows."

Norma, now 72, has ridden since she was 18 months old, when her grandfather put her on a pony. At one point, she began riding his milk cow, and she swiftly received a new, more suitable, equine mount to keep her off the bovine. Much of her time growing up was spent out riding on her grandfather's 380-acre sheep ranch. In 1956, she went off to college at Oregon State University and entered the riding program, which introduced her to English riding.

"My daughter was in Pony Club here in Roseburg," Norma says. "Of course, I took her to all the meetings and got started riding with her. I didn't get into dressage until my daughter was 9 when we joined the Roseburg Jumping Horse Club and started doing some dressage. I think it is the basis for all good riding. The things you teach your horse and yourself in dressage goes to all phases of riding."

Norma now works with 28 4-H kids and says her qualifying Century Club ride resulted from a challenge with them.

"It was kinda like, 'Oh, you can't do that,'" she says, "and I'm like, 'Yes I can! If I can do it, you kids can do it. Now go to work on this!'"

She has been a 4-H leader for 42 years, coaching riders in English, western, jumping and dressage. An active volunteer, Norma obviously loves the community of Roseburg, and Quarter Horses weave into the fabric of the life she enjoys on her 15-acre place there – and one Quarter Horse senior citizen in particular.

"Jonie likes anything that you do with her for the attention," Norma says with a chuckle. "She's a little foundation Quarter Horse. She's a bay mare. Right now she has nothing but her front teeth. She's actually a little overweight right now. She gets grain with alfalfa pellets twice a day. I put warm water and corn oil on her feed. She doesn't get any extra supplements. Everybody that says they can't keep their horse fat, I tell them to come look at mine! She has raised six or seven foals. All of her babies have been really super nice."

"Some of your Quarter Horses are doing very good in (dressage)," she points out. "Particularly the ones we've taken off the racetrack. There are quite a few Quarter Horses in the dressage circuit. ... They are one of the most versatile breeds there is. From the cutting and reining, right down to being a good honest horse for a kid to learn to ride on. The (4-H) kids come in with some kind of a crazy horse, and I ask them to please go find a nice gentle Quarter Horse that will teach you how to ride." ❧

Visit [www.dressagefoundation.org](http://www.dressagefoundation.org) to learn more about the Dressage Foundation. And to learn how riders – of any age – can get started in dressage with their American Quarter Horse, go to [americashorsedaily.com](http://americashorsedaily.com) and search for "dressage." Among the articles you'll find is an explanation of how you can earn AQHA points at a dressage show.