

## **Interview With Renowned Horse Trainer Chris Cox**

*Chris Cox is an internationally renowned horse trainer and world travelled clinician. He grew up in Pony Club. He was the Keynote Speaker at the 2013 USPC Annual Meeting & Equine Symposium. Graduate A Jessica Schley from the Camino Real Region interviewed Chris about his experiences in Pony Club and his thoughts about today's horse industry.*

*By Jessica Schley*

**Tell me a little about growing up in Pony Club, the challenges you faced, and how that made you the horseman you are today.**

Chris Cox: Pony Club was a big part of stepping up my horsemanship I believe, back in the 1970s. We just had a lot of fun. I learned a lot about being competitive, sportsmanship, and I also built a lot of friendships. It was a great foundation to start with. Whether you're a western rider or whatever you do, Pony Club has a great foundation and is a really good start.

**As you know, Pony Club is adding a western component. What do you think about these new changes?**

Chris Cox: At the moment, Pony Club membership is 96% girls. Bringing Western into this organization is going to increase the number of boys right away and bring that number more into balance, and open Pony Club up to more people than would access it otherwise. I believe that if bringing in western standards is done right and good horsemanship is used, I think that the sky is the limit.

**Of course, developing strong horse management skills in youth is one of the things Pony Club is most well known for.**

Chris Cox: One of the biggest problems in the western horse industry today is that anyone can hang out a shingle calling themselves a horse trainer. It's not regulated. What Pony Club has been able to do is develop a platform where, if members become trainers, they've got some standard of education to start from and can build from there, which gives them a foundation. With that, you can attain access to better horses, better clients, and build a more successful career and business.

**Jessica: What is one piece of advise you can give a young Pony Club member that loves horses and loves riding but knows that not everybody can become a horse trainer?**

Chris Cox: Well, first of all, you have to do it as a passion and not a job. If you think of it as a job you'll never be successful or happy. For one thing, the hours are a lot different than your 9-5 job, and the desire to continuously get better, and the elements, the hot and cold weather, the driving all day trying to get

somewhere. It's a big commitment. But I think that if you can commit yourself early and get on a straight path and you stick to it, you'll get there a lot quicker and be a lot more successful.

**So, even for the kids who decide they are not going into horse training but they want to stay involved with horses because they love it, they can do other things in the industry that will allow them to stay involved?**

Chris Cox: You know, it's the passion. We're in it because we love horses and we love being a horseman. You don't have to become a horse trainer to have a passion for horses.

**What is the number one challenge you overcame as a young pony clubber that helped you become the horseman you are today?**

Chris Cox: Learning how to control my emotions. My temper, my frustrations. Because that feeds right into the horses. In order for me to become a better horseman, I had to learn to control that. I had to learn how to become more positive, and control my breathing, and understand that it wasn't the horse, it was me. And when I looked at myself and learned it was only myself, that's when I became a horseman.

**If you had only one piece of advice to give to a Pony Club member today, what would that be?**

Chris Cox: Try to find the most accomplished and best person that you would like to be like, that you admire, go clean their stalls, observe them, try to be like them, do anything they need, so they knew you had the dedication and the desire to learn and work hard and pay your dues and grow. The one problem today is everyone wants to pay and be taught. It just doesn't happen that way. The real things you learn can't be taught in a lesson. If you drive there, have to take a train there, if you show the incentive, and you show the desire to want to learn, that person will help you.

**What is the number one challenge that horsemen and horse owners face today?**

Chris Cox: The way the country is moving it's making it harder and harder to have horses. Some of the government legislation, the rising cost of feed, fewer pasture lands, lack of open space and trails, is becoming something we really need to think about. Horses have been a part of this country from the beginning and that's something we really need to preserve. It's not talked about on the news, it's not talked about on CNN, but these animals are a backbone to our nation's identity.

From therapeutic riding programs helping our veterans who have come home from war, physically and mentally changing their lives, to things like Pony Club teaching our youth to be responsible and mature, horses are such a strong part of our identity and culture and heritage. That's not talked about enough. It's something that is really important and it isn't well known.

The horse has done so much for this country. I don't know what the bald eagle has done for this country. The horse should be our national symbol of freedom along with the American flag.