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A Survey of Horse Training in New England

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Purpose

There is a distinct lack of a significant horse training industry in New England. Small farms and individual practices are the norm, but there is little to no overlap in training practices or philosophies. However, the training programs that are present are not lacking in success. Trainers, riders, and horses from New England often compete within regional, national, and even international levels. This leads to the conclusion that the strategies that are employed by trainers in New England are both strategic and successful, even if the exact methods are not uniform between the various training operations.

The purpose of this study is to give an idea of what techniques and schedules are most prevalent in the New England area by top tier trainers, in order to bring attention to this underappreciated sector of the New England economy and answer the simple question of how sporadic training operations are able to find competitive success at regional, national, and international levels.

Methods

This study was performed at the New England Morgan Horse Show, in interview with trainers and owners, and by survey. The New England Morgan Horse Show was located in Northampton, Massachusetts and occurred from July 20-26, 2014. Surveys were distributed in person, via email, and in an online format.

Interviews were oral administration of online survey but with additional questions asked if time allowed. Survey results were then analyzed for presence of trends in commonly used techniques or strategies, as well as looking for any outliers. All survey responses (email, interview, on paper, online) were included in one data set. As time allowed, classes of the New England Morgan Horse Show were viewed. The purpose of this being to watch how the various trainers, riders, and horses actually act in the ring.



Figure 1.



Figure 2.

Figure 1. Driving class at New England Morgan Horse Show

Figure 2. Under saddle class at New England Morgan Horse Show

Results

Do you own, train, or both own and train?

Own	Train	Both
36%	9%	55%

Table 1.

The majority of individuals surveyed identified themselves as both a trainer and an owner. This is likely due to the smaller scale approach to horse training in New England, where there very few large horse operations. However, individuals who identify as either a trainer or owner exclusively are not entirely absent.

Are all your show horses kept on the same schedule?

Yes	No
50%	50%

Table 3.

According to the results presented in table 3, trainers who have a training regimen that all horses follow make up half of the trainers in New England. This is similar to the question presented in table 2, and the results of these two survey questions seem to imply that the smaller training operations in New England are more able and willing to design training programs that fit each horse specifically, in order for each horse to be trained in the manner that is best suited for the individual horse.

Are your horses maintained on a strict schedule?

Yes	No
60%	40%

Table 2.

The majority of individuals surveyed reported that they maintained a strict schedule with their horses. However, the majority was not overbearing, making up 60% of the survey responses. Therefore, it is important to note that even though trainers who maintain a strict schedule are the majority of trainers in New England, there is still a substantial number of trainers who do not maintain a strict schedule with their horses.

Do you find that longer or shorter training sessions are more successful?

Shorter	Longer	Varies
60%	0%	40%

Table 4.

The majority of individuals surveyed expressed that they find that shorter training sessions are more successful. A significant number of individuals also expressed that the most successful length varies, but none answered that they found longer sessions were the most successful. The 40% of those surveyed who responded that the length of training session that is most successful varies in length again show flexibility that is likely made possible due to training operations in New England being smaller scale, and therefore each horse can have more attention devoted to it.

The survey questions above were selected out of the survey in its entirety due to the fact that they express the main trends seen in the survey

Conclusions

This survey study brought awareness of the traits used by the average New England trainer. The results presented in the results column show that the average New England trainer is both a horse owner and trainer, maintains a strict schedule with the horses, may or may not keep all competition horses on the same schedule, and finds shorter training sessions to be more successful. The survey results not presented in tables here document the average New England trainer as focusing on training competitive riding horses (opposed to pleasure horses, driving, etc.), willing to vary weaning age based on the foal, and believes intelligence in horses to be mainly inherited rather than a learned behavior.

The next steps for this research would be to do a similar studies in different geographic area of the United States. This would allow easy and accurate comparisons to be done between the regions of the US, giving more context to this study and all the proposed future regional studies. A similar study to this one could also be performed, but include more training operations/trainers in the research in order to obtain responses from a larger sector of the horse community, and hopefully produce more accurate results. This study could have been improved in multiple ways, especially areas such as sample size, but it does serve as a good foundational set of data that can be enriched and expanded in future years.

Significance

The data collected in this survey study can be used in a variety of beneficial manners. First, information on what methods New England trainers employ is of economic importance. Though the horse population of New England is relatively dispersed, there is a substantial horse population. Upper level competition horses are of even more substantial economic importance because many training operations at this level are the luxury hobbies of the wealthy. Another use for the data collected is to be the foundational data in a study that monitors the changes in the methods and strategies of New England trainers annually so that changes over years can be tracked, recorded, and studied. Though basic, this information collected serves to improve the New England economy, bring awareness to the horse community of New England, and encourage future research in years to come in the topic both in New England and throughout other regions of the United States.

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