

ECLECTIC HORSEMAN



HORSE-DRAWN FARM: HORSE POWERED PRODUCE 4 • MY HORSE HAS A HARD MOUTH 7 • THE WALK: POWER EXERCISES 8

THE CRICKET AND ITS FUNCTION BY MARTIN BLACK 18 • INTRODUCING THE YOUNG HORSE TO THE HACKAMORE 20

GET READY FOR THE FAIR: MEET JENNIFER TRUETT 22 • MAKE SPACE FOR A MEANINGFUL PAUSE 24 • I FEAR FOR THE MIDDLE 25

Get Ready for the Fair A WHOLE HORSE APPROACH:

INSIDE THE COMMUNITY OF JENNIFER TRUETT

*J*ennifer Truett is a familiar and highly sought-after name in the American dressage world. As a successful clinician and coach for both the United States Dressage Federation (USDF) and Fédération Équestre Internationale (FEI), she has spent decades cultivating a deep understanding of horses and riders, running the bustling Dancing Horse Farm in Lebanon, Ohio. She is also an upcoming presenter at the prestigious Midwest Horse Fair. However, what sets Jennifer apart is not just her accolades, but a holistic, adaptive, and community-driven philosophy forged through an exceptionally diverse equestrian background.

FROM QUARTER HORSES TO GRAND PRIX: A DIVERSE EQUESTRIAN JOURNEY

For many trainers in the U.S., the path to specializing in dressage often begins elsewhere—a reality Jennifer personifies. Growing up in Ohio with a forward-seat riding instructor for a mother, she was practically born horseback.

"I grew up with quarter horses, showing on the open circuit, doing quarter horse things," she recalls. This meant participating in everything from driving and showmanship to bareback hunt seat, and many Western classes.

This early exposure to a multitude of disciplines became the bedrock of her unique training perspective. "I feel like what I bring is an understanding of how to get a horse to find self-carriage and balance without me having to forcefully put them together," she explains. The need for a horse to respond to the subtlest shift of the seat in Western and communication only via reins and voice in carriage driving taught her to prioritize a fluid, balanced movement over forceful collection.

Jennifer's quest for a greater challenge led her from the Quarter Horse ring to eventing, where she first found dressage. "I got a little tired of the politics and just always winning ... there's gotta be more than this," she admits of her competitive youth. By 18 years old, she was fully focused on dressage, working as a working student while simultaneously pursuing a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's in criminal justice.

This varied background, which included a stint in the corporate world before she committed full time to professional training in Ohio, allows her to connect with and coach amateurs and professionals alike.

THE ANALYST AND THE FLOWCHART: APPLYING PSYCHOLOGY TO THE SADDLE

While many in the horse world joke that "all horse people are crazy" (a sentiment she confirms with a laugh), her psychology background is a profound asset. It informs her ability to teach both the mechanics of riding and the mental game—for both horse and human.

"It's very interesting, when you step back and look at what horses do provide to people's psyches," Jennifer reflects.

During the pandemic, this insight drove a critical decision: "When all of the farms around me were shutting down, I refused... these horses are emotional support animals for their people," she says. She implemented an hourly schedule to allow owners to continue seeing their horses, prioritizing her clients' mental well-being and the bonds with their animals.

The analytical side of her education, particularly her experience with prescribed patterns in reining and her master's level research, fuels her passion for dressage—a sport of precise, measurable patterns. She views training through what she calls a "flowchart style."

"I ask the horse a question, and [the answer is] did the horse understand that, yes or no? How did they do? Yes or no?" she explains. This approach strips the emotion out of a session. If a horse fails to perform a movement, the rider doesn't get angry; they simply move to the next step in the chart.

"We dive into the no's," she says. "There's no reason to become emotional if it's a flow chart. It's just black and white." This calm, analytical exchange with the horse is key to his development: "The horses relax."

THE COMMUNITY OF DANCING HORSE FARM: A CHOSEN FAMILY

Perhaps the most fascinating element of Jennifer's life is the community she has created at Dancing Horse Farm. Moving away from the typical riding school model with high turnover, she has cultivated a dedicated collective of serious adult amateurs, multiple resident trainers, and a supportive staff—a place she lovingly refers to as a "commune of my best friends."

This community is a diverse mix of people who live on the farm, utilizing on-site housing, campers, and living quarters trailers. They come from as far as Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin, often to participate in intensive training boot camps.

"We've been able to build this ... this community, this family here," Jennifer beams. The atmosphere is one of unwavering support, whether they are at home or competing at national finals.

"They all sit out around their trailers and, you know, just



Jennifer Truett and Dreamy. Photo by Diana Hadsall.

talk about their lessons and what they're learning. And when we go to shows, it's nothing but supportive. We've built such an environment of learning."

This spirit of camaraderie also extends to her role as a mentor. Jennifer has an impressive track record of producing full-time, successful trainers from her apprenticeship program. Her most recent assistant was hired not based on her riding video, but on her dedication and success in training her own fiery mare to a high level.

"We've all chosen each other. Instead of being born into it, we've chosen this family, and it's incredible," she says.

THE HOLISTIC APPROACH: TRAINING THROUGH WELLNESS

A cornerstone of Jennifer's philosophy is her holistic approach, which demands looking at every component of the horse's life before any serious training begins.

"I want to train the horse to train the horse. I don't want to have to train past physical problems, or equipment-caused problems," she states.

Her first step with a new client is a complete physical assessment. She works closely with veterinarians and farriers, looking at everything from the hyoid apparatus and TMJ, down the spine for any painful reactions, to the balance and angles of the horse's feet. She's found serious issues like kissing spine and pinched nerves that required medical treatment before any productive riding could happen.

She often prescribes specific stretches, lunging techniques, or work over cavaletti to address diagonal weaknesses and build the topline before asking for connection or collection.

EXPANDING THE REACH: VIRTUAL LESSONS AND SAVVY HORSE PRODUCTS

In addition to her daily training at Dancing Horse Farm and her clinic circuit (which will take her to the Midwest Horse Fair and Equine Affair), Jennifer has embraced virtual lessons. Virtual lessons are a key tool for keeping her out-of-town clients on track between their in-person intensives.

Finally, in a testament to the business realities of the equine world, Jennifer and her husband, Lenny, have developed a side business: Savvy Horse Products. After taking over the distributorship of a product they loved—the Savvy Feeder—they now manufacture the feeders and develop other premium products right on their farm.

From the dirt of a quarter horse ring to the precision of Grand Prix, from the pages of a psychology textbook to the community of a chosen family, Jennifer Truett has forged an unmistakable path. Her coaching is a blend of mechanical brilliance and emotional intelligence, proving that true success in the horse world is found in looking at the whole picture, and always, always asking "why?"

For more information on teaching, clinics and products please visit jennifertruett.com and savvyhorseproducts.com.

ABOUT MIDWEST HORSE FAIR

Since 1979, with a goal to serve as America's epicenter for the equine community, the fair strives to provide the ultimate experience for equine enthusiasts and the public through exposition, education, and entertainment. As the largest three-day horse fair in the country, it caters to both Western and English riders. The Midwest Horse Fair is owned by the Wisconsin Horse Council, a nonprofit organization that promotes the equine industry in the state of Wisconsin. Proceeds from the fair benefit the Wisconsin Horse Council for grants and scholarships, trail improvements, leadership programs, and communication to help future growth and development of the equine industry. The 2026 fair is scheduled to take place April 17-19 at the Alliant Energy Center in Madison, Wisconsin. For more information, visit MidwestHorseFair.com.

