



My Little Good Luck Charm:

Riding While Pregnant: My Experience and Advice for Riders

By Shannon Venegas

Editor's Note: Photos with article are all of Shannon, her "good luck charm" and her horse, Cruise, in her determined journey.

Life has a way of sneaking up on you sometimes. It likes to throw trees down to block your path or jump out and surprise you. That is what happened to me in February 2020. (Yes, right before the world turned upside with Covid-19.) I was just teaching high school kids and planning my show season, right? I had my heart set on showing at Regional Championships since they would be nearby at Lamplight Equestrian Center.

Then in February, life snuck up on me with a little (actually, **big**) surprise. I discovered I was pregnant. Again.

I had just given birth to a second beautiful baby girl in April of 2019. I had a quiet 2019 show season, so 2020 was supposed to be IT for me—my big year full of showing with the goal of Region 2 championships. But two pink lines changed everything.

Of course, I had a few weeks of emotional breakdown. "I wasn't going to have any more kids," I thought to myself. "I thought I was done." "How can I have two kids under the age of 2? I'm not that mom—that amazing, super organized mom with all the little kids."

And the big question: "What about showing? What about Regionals?"



After a few weeks of feeling a bit down and unsure, Joann Williams, my trainer, and I set other goals for the show season, provided we would have one. We decided I would still show a little, I could sign up for WDCTA awards, and we would start to work on Third Level training a bit.

Turning Point

Then Joann made the mistake during one of my lessons of saying something that changed my whole mindset. "You know," she said, "I saw a woman compete at championships when she was seven months pregnant."

Well, that did it. I was bound and determined. I was at least going to consider the possibility of showing at Regionals 7½ months pregnant.

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Little Good Luck Charm continued

I started researching and reading blogs and articles written by women who rode throughout their pregnancies. My doctor said the same thing she told me with all of my pregnancies: “As long as there are no sudden jarring movements, you should be fine. Just be safe.”

While pregnant with my first child, I was riding a Saddlebred—my unpredictable, spooky but beautiful Saddlebred, Johnny Cash, with his narrow body and somewhat choppy gaits. By five months, my balance was off, and he let me know with the obvious pinning of his ears. At that time, I stopped riding, and another girl at the barn kept Johnny in work.

In 2019 with my second child, I was still riding that crazy Saddlebred, but had also gained a steady, trustworthy Oldenburg gelding, Cruise. At five months, though, I stopped riding again, assuming that was what I was supposed to do. It was winter, with no horse shows to work toward, so it was fine. This time, Joann took over riding the two boys. Eventually, though, after having two kids, I decided I could not keep splitting my time between two horses. We retired Johnny and put all of our efforts into the slightly younger Cruise.

So this time around, I thought to myself, do I really have to stop at five months again? I read blogs and articles about women who rode all the way until



practically giving birth. Some were pleasure riders, but others competed.

So I did it. I made championships a goal, worked out, and rode consistently.

At our first show of 2020, we got our qualifiers done for Training Level. Then at our next show, we earned our first 70%. At that point, I started calling the little boy in my belly my good luck charm. And he never let me down! At our next show, we got an amateur high point ribbon, and at our fourth show, we qualified for our First Level freestyle for championships. I was overjoyed!

I was a bit hesitant to sign up for championships, though. It was still a month away. Could I make it that long?

Darn right, I did! We made it to Region 2 Championships! I got a few odd looks, but also some impressed smiles and encouragement from other riders in the ring. And how about Cruise at his first championships? He was a dream. He was slightly more energetic than usual the first day or two, but he never took a wrong step or even threatened a spook. He settled in and seemed at ease almost immediately!



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Little Good Luck Charm continued

We didn't win any championships, but we did end up bringing home an 8th place championship ribbon in our First Level freestyle championship, which was a fairly large class. It was our first regional championship ribbon! We also placed second in an open class. Our Training Level championship ride wasn't as successful as I hoped, but we finished in the middle of a huge pack of nearly 30 riders, so I counted that a success!

Did I have doubts? Oh, yes. I broke down crying to my husband a few times, questioning whether I was doing the right thing or if I was hurting the baby. He always reassured me by telling me that I was not new to riding. My body had been riding almost every day for years, and most doctors will tell you that the best thing for your health is to keep doing what you love. As long as the doctor said it was okay, and I felt okay, riding was probably the best thing for me, not only to stay physically active, but to stay emotionally healthy. And I truly believe that. Plus, I trusted my horse, which is priceless.

In the end, it is about your personal comfort level. Is your horse unpredictable? Then take a step back during your pregnancy. Are you uncomfortable? Then maybe it's time to take a break. Trust yourself.

And as mentioned previously, I also believe that little boy in my belly was my little good luck charm. I qualified for regionals right away, got my first 70%, got my first high point ribbon, rode a First Level musical freestyle, and competed at Regionals for the first time, placing eighth in a championships class. It was my best season yet, and I did it with a little partner.

Tips for Pregnant Riders

#1—Know your horse. I didn't trust my Saddlebred. He could be an angel one moment and spinning around to take off the next, so I had to stop early in the pregnancy when I was riding him. This time, I was blessed to be on one of the quietest, sweetest boys I have ever ridden. He took care of me, and I love him for that.

#2—Eat right. I am not known for this. My idea of breakfast is cookies and milk. Well, during my pregnancy, I still had cookies and milk, but I had half



the amount of cookies and substituted for half a banana. I also honored my cravings while not overeating excessively. Yes, you have to eat a few hundred more calories while pregnant, but indulgence has its limits.

I also brought high-energy, pregnancy-safe foods to the horse shows as afternoons were especially rough for me (reflux, exhaustion, etc.). I specifically researched foods that wouldn't irritate my reflux, would help me in the heat, and would give me a boost of energy. I brought mangos, peaches, watermelon, almonds, granola, and crackers, with plenty of water (some added electrolytes). I will admit that on show days, I didn't eat any full meals prior to rides, but I continued to snack and stay hydrated. I figured I would catch up on my calories after my rides. This is a personal choice, though. Some women can eat a hamburger and ride down centerline 20 minutes later. My nerves and reflux don't allow for that.

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Little Good Luck Charm continued

#3—Stay in Shape. And I don't just mean riding. I had to force myself to exercise outside of riding and cleaning stalls. This was not easy, as I despise working out. But I knew I had to. On days I didn't ride, I found trimester-appropriate workouts on YouTube for cardio, and on days I did ride, I did pregnancy core workouts and back strengthening exercises as I tend to get tailbone pain when I am pregnant. Riding consistently is also important; I tried to ride 4-5 days a week, even if it was only for 20 minutes. Joann started to split the lesson rides with me at about 5 ½ months, but I tried to make sure I could still do a full ride on my own for the shows.

#4—Invest in support equipment.

One rider said it was her pregnancy support belt that helped her keep riding, so I bought one. I will admit though, that while it was helpful for things such as walking, standing around at the shows, and picking Cruise's heavy feet, I felt it was uncomfortable while riding. For riding, I invested in products from a company called Blanqi, which make support tank tops and camisoles. They provided me with a light hold around my belly for extra support. For breeches, I recommend the Horze Frida breeches. They are like sweatpants with full seat grip. When I first tried them on, I felt ridiculous as they came up so high on my belly and were looser than I was used to, but they were my go-to breech and fit me the entire pregnancy. I was also able to use my breeches that button for a while. I left them unbuttoned but with a support band around the top to keep them up. For showing, the white Horze Brea breeches fit me best. I went a size up on any breeches I purchased and had the legs taken in as they were too big. Horze tights were my best friend while pregnant.



#5—Know when to stop. When I got on Cruise, I felt a light pressure in my pelvis, but it went away after a posting trot circle. I also had instances of some tailbone pain and round ligament pain when riding. When was my discomfort a sign to stop? I typically quit

for the day if I felt cramping or the discomfort stopped me from riding well. Then I knew it just wasn't a good day to ride. One tip: Empty your bladder before you get on (and be prepared to get off and go to the bathroom again in some cases) and minimize/eliminate sitting trot. In addition, take lots of walk breaks if it's hot.

Knowing your balance is also important. I felt discombobulated in my first pregnancy, especially with riding such a narrow horse. On Cruise, however, I felt very little difference in my balance. He is a well-bodied, balanced horse, which helped.

#6—Have a support team.

I could never have done this show season by myself. When you're pregnant and it's hot, as this summer was, you need extra help. Since the kids could not attend this year, my mom would babysit so my husband, Mario, could

come groom and help me at the shows. I am blessed with a horsey husband who encouraged me to keep riding as long as I felt comfortable and who is a 10 times better groom than I will ever be. And when he had to work, I hired a babysitter and my mom came along as my groom, following me to the warm-up ring with water bottles and cooling rags. Joann was also a blessing throughout the entire season. She was cautious but encouraging and always put my health first, without losing sight of my goals. Then when I decided to add another goal to the list and put together a freestyle in two weeks, she said, "Let's do it." Thank God for her patience with me. I second-guessed myself a lot, but she was always there to encourage and calm me.

This article is not intended as medical advice from WDCTA. Consult your physician about your personal situation.



Determination in Unusual Times

What a year it's been! Still, I'm inspired by all the riders, judges, show organizers, coaches/trainers, and volunteers who were determined to run shows and help riders succeed in this very odd show season.

To that point, I really enjoyed Shannon's article about not only riding while pregnant, but setting goals to qualify for championships—and she did it! I am so impressed for a lot of reasons including, while I've never been pregnant, I still have problems with balance and I have never had an "excuse" like being pregnant!

Hats off, also, to her support team for helping her reach her goals, including her trainer, Joann Williams, who kept her and the baby's health in mind and figured out her training program, which included Joann riding her horse at the times it was too uncomfortable for Shannon to ride. It also sounds like Shannon has an awesome husband and a terrific mom. Last, but not least, my heart goes to her horse who was a good and steady partner at the qualifying shows and *then* handled a very electric atmosphere at the regional championships at Lamplight. This is why I love horses so much. They don't have to do ANY of this for us, and for some unfathomable reason, they let us put a saddle on them, a bridle, and sit on them while guiding them around a sandbox with letters and flowers when they could be happily grazing in a field!

Here's to next year's show season and everyone reaching their goals, big or small. In the meantime, work hard in your lessons but don't forget to enjoy trails or simply grooming your horse.

Caryn

P.S. The 2021 membership form is on the next page. Let's hope 2021 allows us to have our many educational opportunities and events as we usually do during the year! We appreciate your support during these very unusual times.

Caryn Vesperman Editor

All advertisements, articles and photographs (with photo release) should be submitted by the 15th of the preceding month of publication, unless you make prior arrangements for additional time.

Calendar of events will appear in both the eQuarter and on the WDCTA website.

Payment for advertisements should be submitted via PayPal through the WDCTA website (wdcta.org) or mailed with a check made out to WDCTA and mailed to the editor.

CONTACT INFO
(608) 695-9914
W1619 King Road
Brooklyn, WI 53521
newsletter@wdcta.org



DEADLINE!

November 30 is the last day (postmark) to send in your information to verify your submissions for the 2020 WDCTA year-end awards!

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MEMBERSHIP TERM: December 1 – November 30



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- ___ Clinic or Event
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*** Would you like to receive other horse-related mailings that are not affiliated with WDCTA? **YES NO**

DISCIPLINES:

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RIDER STATUS:

- ___ Professional
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- ___ **Southwest** (SW Wisconsin, Madison and surrounding area)
- ___ **Upper Peninsula** (Upper Michigan and northern WI)
- ___ **Central** (Portage, Green Bay, Stevens Point, and central area)
- ___ **Kettle Moraine** (Milwaukee, Sheboygan, FDL and southeast WI)

* Age as of January 1

MEMBERSHIP CLASSIFICATION AND FEES (Includes the \$4 increase for USDF.)

- \$164 BUSINESS Membership** – Includes one USDF Group membership; emailed newsletter; one voting privilege; recognition & business card ad in eQuester, listing & logo on WDCTA website. Also, INCLUDES Stable, Instructor, Breeder & Business listings (chose one or all four) in both eQuester & website.
- \$64 FAMILY Membership** - Includes one USDF group membership; emailed newsletter; two voting privileges. USDF requires that an additional USDF membership be purchased for each additional family member. Add \$10 for each additional family member.
 - \$10** Add'l family member name _____ Birth date if age 21 or less _____
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- \$39 JUNIOR Membership -- Birth date** _____ (must be age 17 or less as of January 1st. Do not use in conjunction with a Family Membership. Includes one USDF group membership; emailed newsletter; one voting privilege.

As a member of WDCTA, I may choose to volunteer for Association responsibilities or activities. I expressly agree that my services are being provided as a volunteer and that I am not an employee of the Wisconsin Dressage & Combined Training Association. I am neither entitled to nor expect any present or future salary, wages, or other benefits for these volunteer services. I agree to abide by the WDCTA Standard of Conduct: to act honestly, fairly, ethically and with integrity and treat all WDCTA members with respect and courtesy.

Applicant Signature _____ Date _____

WDCTA STABLE, INSTRUCTOR, BREEDER, BUSINESS LISTINGS -- Listings on website & eQuester. **Must fill out listing form available on WDCTA website and include payment.** (These listings are free when purchasing a Business Membership.)

- \$10 Stable listing
- \$10 Instructor listing
- \$10 Breeder listing
- \$10 Business listing
- \$35 for all four listings

Make check payable to WDCTA & mail to Diane Brault, 5184 County Road HH, Barneveld, WI 53507
membership@wdcta.org or 608-924-1808

Date Received _____	Check # _____	Amount \$ _____
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Photo by Caryn Vesperman

**Send in your photos,
articles about riding,
breeding, horse
vacations, lessons,
clinics, and tips about
riding, horse care, tack,
trails, etc.**

**This is your newsletter,
so share your
experiences! Send to:
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Calendar of Events

WDCTA Events

Oct. 24-25

Postponed until 2021

Laura Graves Symposium

Organizer: WDCTA Southwest Chapter

Location: Alliant Energy Center, Madison

Contact: www.wdcta.org

Member Listings

STABLES

Footloose Farm

Katie Miller

6908 North Co. Rd. J

Reedsville, WI 54230

ktsufak@yahoo.com

(920) 629-0726

Small, private facility, board available w/ lesson program. Great footing in 60' x 160' indoor arena and 66' x 200' outdoor arena. Pastures, dry lots, trails, classical dressage and jumping lessons.

Grand Prix Farm

Jackie Luebke-Puetz

15034 Co. Rd. X

Kiel, WI 53042-9706

cvestor@aol.com

(920) 693-3367

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Megan McIsaac

4246 Schneider Drive

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lindinhofllc@gmail.com

(608) 445-8531

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Abby Onsgard

Abby Onsgard Dressage

521 Memphis Avenue

Madison, WI 53714

(Business address; primary business in Oregon area)

abbyonsgarddressage@gmail.com

(608) 8439552

30 years of teaching experience, USDF Bronze and Silver medals (Gold anticipated in 2020). Multiple year-end, regional and national top 10 awards. School horses available. Will travel.

INSTRUCTORS

Jackie Luebke-Puetz

15034 Co. Rd. X

Kiel, WI 53042-9706

cvestor@aol.com

(920) 693-3367

Will teach through 2nd level, earned USDF Bronze medal. Served on USDF education committee, USEF steward. Will travel.

Megan McIsaac

Lindinhof Equine Sports Zentrum

4246 Schneider Drive

Oregon, WI 53575

lindinhofllc@gmail.com

(608) 445-8531

FEI trainer, USDF-certified instructor thru 4th Level, 2014 national champion with Kingsley. USDF Gold, Silver, Bronze medalist, all USDF bars. Competed four horses at GP. Competed successfully at Dressage at Devon and West Coast Festival. Year-end USDF, USEF, WDCTA awards. 15+ years teaching experience. Students competed through GP, earned rider awards and medals. Travel for lessons and clinics.

Katie Miller

Footloose Farm

6908 North Co. Rd. J

Reedsville, WI 54230

ktsufak@yahoo.com

(920) 629-0726

12 years of classical dressage experience, ridden through 4th level, earned USDF Bronze medal. Avid trail rider. Continuing education w/ Grand Prix trainer. Bachelors degree in teaching, specializing in teaching balanced riding from beginner to intermediate. School horses available. Will travel.

Kate Van Sicklen

110 Merrill Crest Drive

Madison, WI 53705

katherinevansicklen@gmail.com

(608) 669-0148

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Jackie Luebke-Puetz

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Kiel, WI 53042-9706
cvestor@aol.com
(920) 693-3367**

Standing Section A Welsh stallion, Too Cute to Shoot, bay, 13.2 h, cuter than a bug's ear and several times qualified for USDF breeding championships. In 2018, was third in halter for Welsh Association.

Instructor/Trainer Profile

For WDCTA Members Only

These questions are only to get the ideas for your profile started. Use as many of them as you want, and add others as needed. Email or mail this sheet and additional pages. The editor will follow up with any additional questions or clarifications.

Please submit some photos of yourself, facility, horses, etc. to:

Caryn Vesperman, newsletter editor
W1619 King Road, Brooklyn, WI 53521
newsletter@wdcta.org



Name: _____
Address: _____ **City** _____ **State** _____ **Zip** _____
Phone(s): _____
Website: _____ **Email** _____

Teach dressage, jumping, both: _____ **Riding Since Age:** _____

Background History:

Current and Past Instructors/Mentors:

Horses -- Past and Current:

Your Showing/Riding Accomplishments:

Students' Accomplishments:

If you own your facility, describe:

Dream or What Inspires/Motivates You:

Interesting or Amusing Personal Story:

Riding/Training Philosophy or "Motto" or Belief You Try to Pass to Students:

Anything Else?



eQuester Advertising Rates

Mechanicals:

Ad size below. Photos should be submitted as jpegs. Or, mail to editor for scanning. Include self-addressed, stamped envelope for its return.

Deadline:

All calendar submissions, ads and payment must be received by the 15th of the month prior to publication. Make checks out to WDCTA.

WDCTA members receive special rate (in **ORANGE).**
See calendar information at bottom of page.

Editor Contact Info:

Caryn Vesperman
newsletter@wdcta.org
W1619 King Road
Brooklyn, WI 53521

Description	1 x	6 x	12 x
Business Card 3.5 x 2": In <i>eQuester</i> newsletter with link to email OR website.	\$10 (\$9)	\$50 (\$45)	\$100 (\$90)
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Half Page 7.5 x 5" or 3.75 x 10": In <i>eQuester</i> newsletter with links to email AND website.	\$20 (\$15)	\$100 (\$90)	\$195 (\$175)
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Website Banner Ad 180x150 pixels, and can be a .jpg, .gif or .png	N/A	\$200 (\$150)	\$400 (\$300)

eQuester and Website Calendar of Events Submissions: *For WDCTA members only. (Up to 20 words).*

INCLUDE THIS: Date > Event > Location > Contact (Name/Phone/Email) > WDCTA-Sponsored Event (Yes/No)

WDCTA Event: Link to organizer's email and registration form, if applicable

NON-WDCTA-Sponsored Event: Link to organizer's email only.

Member-hosted private riding clinics cannot be advertised in the newsletter at this time.