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Van Gerpen pulls a heavy load to the barrel races, her truck pulling a six horse trailer that is always full of horses, including those she is training, her own that she is racing and even a young horse or two to get them used to the process of going to the races. Her mom Connie rides with her to races that she has her own horse entered in, videotaping the race to give her the advantage to determine if her training strategies are working or if she needs to make adjustments. The videos also help in selling her horses after the futurities season is over. She has sold them all over the United States and usually has one or two for sale at any given time, even generating some repeat buyers. She sells her horses through word of mouth or on her Facebook page at Van Gerpen Performance Horses, often receiving feedback from several of the owners of horses she has trained, clients tagging her on Facebook or sending her texts and videos of progress.

Future goals for Van Gerpen are simple, she just wants to continue training between South Dakota and Arizona. She has some really nice horses that she is excited about because they will soon be old enough to race.

Her advice for anyone interested in riding is that it's never too late, you can get involved at any age; you don't have to be young. "The main thing is to make sure you are on something safe, don't go buy a two year old horse. Buy a safe, older horse and learn how to ride first, then maybe go to something a little younger." She has seen too often where someone will buy a horse too young for their riding experience. With young kids, she advises parents to spend a little extra money and put them onto a safe horse, keeping in mind that just because you think

it's a good deal doesn't mean that it is. Ask around and maybe you can find an older rope horse so the child isn't scared of the horse.

If a younger child is interested in getting into barrel racing, she suggested to go to riding clinics. "When I was younger my parents took me to some different barrel racing clinics and had me ride with different people." Recommending to watch the people that do well at the barrel races and ask for their suggestions, she said sometimes it is one small technique that can make a difference.

Van Gerpen herself is always learning and making adjustments to her training techniques. Over the years of her horse training, the most surprising thing she has discovered is the time commitment involved in horse training, allowing enough time for feeding, training, spending time with, caring for, transportation, and mock race entrances during the year.

Horse riding and training isn't Van Gerpen's only hobby. She squeezes in some golf whenever she has the chance. She just started golfing last summer but took a liking immediately. This is one sport that her whole family partakes in, her dad an avid member on the board at the Bon Homme golf course. Van Gerpen earned herself a spot on the winning team of the women's league in Springfield, SD this year.

With her passion and success for horse riding and training, it looks like Van Gerpen won't be changing careers any time soon. "I can't imagine doing anything else right now. I love it," she says with a beaming smile.

❖ *By Julie Eickhoff*



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