



Horse People: Scenes from the Riding Life

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Bestselling author Michael Korda's *Horse People* is the story -- sometimes hilariously funny, sometimes sad and moving, always shrewdly observed -- of a lifetime love affair with horses, and of the bonds that have linked humans with horses for more than ten thousand years. It is filled with intimate portraits of the kind of people, rich or poor, Eastern or Western, famous or humble, whose lives continue to revolve around the horse.

Korda is a terrific storyteller, and his book is intensely personal and seductive, a joy for everyone who loves horses. Even those who have never ridden will be happy to saddle up and follow him through the world of horses, horse people, and the riding life.

Horse People: Scenes from the Riding Life Details

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From Reader Review Horse People: Scenes from the Riding Life for online ebook

Angela R. says

Thought I did not find the main character to be someone I could relate to (or even particularly like) I did enjoy this book. I am one of those "horse people" but neither the "old money" or "new money" types he mostly talks about. This book makes it sound like horses are a game for wealthy people trying to hang onto those traditions of gentility and social class that put them above other people. Most of the horse people I know are like me, hard-working, middle class Americans who occasionally exist on Ramen noodles and Mac N Cheese just to pay the horse's board. If only my biggest problem was finding and keeping good help at my small private estate. Must be nice to have that problem!

Sasha says

In this book the author, one of those infinitely lucky people who can afford to keep horses on their own land, shares his numerous experiences with equines and the humans who love them. He's ridden with Virginia foxhunters, spent mornings riding in Central Park, and dabbled in showing. Most of the praise of the relationship between horse and human is given to Korda's wife, who had some successful years showing in eventing. Korda describes the long line of horses that graced their lives in an appreciative and dryly humorous English tone, but also touches on the "spiritual" relationship people are finding with horses, though he can barely contain his derision for the New Age saps who write about it. It can be a little dry in places, but interesting enough for the horse-obsessed. In all, a very engaging peek into the lives of people who can't get enough of horses.

Josh says

after finishing this book. i can say its disjointed at best, lacking any type of narrative structure that i would call streamlined. its like a compilation of journal entries over a not that interesting 25 year period.

Susan says

It probably helps to be a 'horse person' to fully enjoy Mr. Korda's recounting of his life with equines, but you don't have to be. However, being a self-styled horse person, I did love Horse People most of all because of the wonderful way Korda illustrates the provocative relationship humans and equines. Mostly, though, I loved it because it was a Horse Man telling the story. At least in my experience, there are far more Horse Women in the saddle than the opposite sex.

Jim says

In some ways, this was a 4 star book about horses, but more of a 3. It wanders a bit with choppy timelines & can be repetitious or even boring in spots. Korda isn't a bitten-by-the-bug type of horseman nor does he get his hands too dirty, but he admits that. Given his job, the top editor of Simon & Shuster, I wouldn't expect it of him. He writes well & credibly, though. Some of his wandering is entertaining & I learned a lot about city riding that I hadn't known, if it was true.

Unfortunately, he's dishonest &/or disingenuous about Fox Hunting & horse slaughter & that makes me wonder where else he's led me astray. Probably nothing of importance since I know horses & horse people at least as well as he does, but he still loses 2 stars, one for each instance in which I caught him.

Fox Hunting is actually now known as Fox Chasing, which it was & has been even back in the time Korda recounts about in Middleburg, VA. I read that section & thought he was really good capturing the hunting people, but he doesn't know squat about actually riding in a hunt. According to Korda, only rich thrill seekers & nuts seem to hunt & the purpose is to kill the fox. **WRONG!!!**

Not a big deal, but then he went on to further foster that opinion about the hunt around his property in Upstate NY. Supposedly one of the proponents of the hunt says it helps farmers protect their chickens. He has to be kidding. No real fox chaser would say anything like that except in jest. A fox hound can't get into a fox den. That's why Fox Terriers & Jack Russells were bred, neither of which are carried on the saddles of any US hunt that I've known or heard of. He's slick about this lie, though. In Middleburg, he has one person say the hunt isn't about the fox, but the way he paints the guy drinking, who would believe him? Sorry, Korda, you flat out lied & you had to know it.

If a fox goes to ground, the run is done. Good job & thanks for the run. I've known foxes to run from their cover around an area a couple of times & then go to ground right where we picked them up regularly. It wasn't as if we (2 dozen baying hounds & maybe 50 people on horse back) snuck up on them. One was close to the kennels and knew damn well we were coming. If she didn't feel like playing, she just didn't come out. Her choice & we appreciated it when she wanted to play.

Further, he talks about how wild & crazy a run is. He fails to mention there are usually at least 2 fields; jumpers (fast) & non-jumpers (slow). The first can get pretty wild & is a blast. The second is paced for those with weaker riding skills & green horses. Many hilltop, too. That's just viewing the hunt from afar. He mentions drag hunts, but never went on one. That's where a sack is dragged earlier in the day or even the day before & the hounds follow that scent. No wild fox involved. They're not as fun because foxes are sneakier & far less predictable, which is part of the excitement.

Apparently he's against horse slaughter too. He tells us how many horses were shipped one year, but fails to mention how many are born or what the trends are. I agree with him that the numbers are too high, but have no respect for anyone who paints half a picture on an emotionally charged problem, using the numbers with the most impact, & then wanders off. Only one side told & no solutions are offered. He talks about some alternatives, but fails to mention how few horses fit into those programs.

For instance, he makes a big, shining deal out of one old, lame mare who will take up space in a penal program for life, but doesn't mention that if she were put down, a dozen other younger, better horses could have used her slot to be rehabilitated & sent on to decent homes. Instead, what becomes of them? Slaughter? I sure hope not, but it might be better than the alternative of starving to death out on some backwoods farm,

which happens all too often. Like dogs & cats, there are more horses bred than people can take care of. The Thoroughbred racing industry is only one part of the problem, but it is the richest target, so the whole way Korda handled this seemed like a cheap shot to me.

I don't recall a mention of his son, Chris, once he was remarried, but I found it odd, no matter what Chris has turned into (the transgender leader of the Church of Euthanasia) according to Wikipedia.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Korda

That's his business, but I found the lack very sad. My kids' horseback adventures are some of my fondest memories. He has my condolences there.

Crystal says

Slow, but good enough to stop & start. Without drama and a commitment to a story line this was a pleasure to read. To someone who knows zilch about horses like myself, Korda gives good insight and something(s) to think about when it comes to the love, care and responsibilities of horseownership.

Yet, personally, I wish he would have said something more about his son. What on earth became of him? After all, the man partly owes his reborn interest in horse riding to the six year old.

Jean says

How can you not like a book in which the author describes being thrown by his horse Zapata thusly: "...the moment you exchanged a seat in the saddle for a trip through thin air Zapata was off and running, kicking, breaking his reins, galloping flat out, letting off triumphant, thunderous farts in a wild ecstasy of motion."

Korda is erudite, urbane, intellectual and funny. This is a memoir of his mature life, built around his and his wife's relationships with their horses. Likable, with loads of well drawn observations of a certain class of wealthy horse owners, and many more of not so wealthy horse lovers.

Carrie says

I will give the book jacket this much. This book is "intensely personal." To the point of being completely uninteresting to anyone who is not Michael Korda. I wanted funny anecdotes about crazy horse people, not the story of how you met your hot model girlfriend while riding horses in Central Park.

Ingrid says

Even though it's written from the perspective of someone who is not totally passionate about horses (which he admits himself, though he enjoys riding), this is an enjoyable read for the horse lover, or anyone who has spent time in the company of horses or the people whose worlds revolve around them. There's many amusing anecdotes from shopping for the perfect horse (one's fast, one's slow, one's just plain crazy!) to broken automatic horse waterers to all the cranky, old, young, weird or whimsical people whose lives are inexorably

entwined with horses.

Rebekah says

This book is great for people who are already into horses- it may be lost on those with little knowledge of the horse world, but it provided many hours of lighthearted fun. Korda tells of his experiences with horses and the people that surround them, and how he fell into the world that sucked him in further and further until much of his life centered around the animal he had once intended to bring into his life only as a hobby.

This book really makes you think about all the lessons that horses do teach us.

Kate says

Pretentious, boring crap. Here and there an insightful characterization or anecdote will get your hopes up, but for the most part this book is a "Look at me, I'm so rich, my wife looks great in her underpants, we are super" vanity project that made me cranky. I read this book years ago and I'm still mad I bought it. There are so many horse books out there that are worth reading: Horse Heaven by Jane Smiley is an excellent place to start. Don't bother with this one. If you're a real horse person, it will only irritate you.

Wolf says

My main problem with this book - or one of them - was my expectations. I was not expecting a memoir or even first-person narration. I actually thought this would be more informational, scientific, or... something of that sort. So that was a huge disappointment. Outside of that, it was very repetitive, and despite claims in the book that Korda isn't prone to anthropomorphism, the last half was very clearly just that. He nearly drove me crazy with his continuous blabbering on about how he "isn't so sure about" the authenticity of 'spiritual' connections or how his horse FEELS about so-and-so author's claim to spiritual responsibilities or a sisterhood between woman and horse... and how dare people put so much burden on horses by using them as therapeutic teachers. Not to mention his steadily ambivalent and removed judgments on horses and "the horse world" seemed a little haughty, as if he enjoyed the time he spent with horses but knew his wife was awesome and he couldn't be bothered to compete with all the better horsemen or to actually try improving his horse skills.

Of course, here *I* am being judgmental - always the hypocrite. But it just irritated me how carefree his attitude seemed to be from the very beginning. Maybe I read into it wrong and he wasn't as bored and mildly amused as it sounded, but either way this book wasn't a very enjoyable read for me. His prose was probably artistic and flowing and it got the job done, but honestly the sentences were usually very long and involved a lot of commas. They weren't technically run-on sentences, but I could clearly tell they were over the top. And I'll say it again: the book was very repetitive. The book as a whole repeated similar scenes and reused the same observations on life (presumptuous as they were), but even more irritating than just the circularity of the "plot" was the fact that on a single page, I could read the same paragraph twice, written with only slight changes in adjectives, adverbs, and grammar.

I would not recommend this to any horse lovers. It was tolerable but really not worth the ridiculous amount

of time I spent reading it.

Lyz says

Expected nice stories about the horse back riding life, instead got a bunch of uninteresting stories interspersed with him divorcing his wife (who doesn't seem to care for horses much) and ending up with another woman and trying to justify it. Got bored halfway through.

Ms.pegasus says

They might be called the “horse nation,” a wide swathe ranging from those who own horses or grew up with them, to those who merely on occasion ride. They love the rich smell of horses and leather; they may even fill their homes with horse-themed paraphernalia. This is the natural audience for Korda's collection of essays about himself and his wife, Margaret. It's an audience with strong individual opinions about horses and the book will certainly elicit criticism on one point or another. For example, Korda touches only briefly on the problem of overbreeding in the thoroughbred industry, and not at all on the Bureau of Land Management's shameful mustang culling program. He does, however, visit “The Farm” at Wallkill Correctional Facility where a program connects prisoners with rescue horses. The prisoners learn not only to care for the horses, but form a genuine bond with them. Korda is at his best, however, when he describes his own personal encounters with the horse and with some indelible horse people.

One of the funniest anecdotes occurs early on in the book. He is riding Mephisto, an Arab-Welsh pony cross, in London's Hyde Park. Mephisto, of typically resolute and independent pony nature, not only refuses to move forward, but backs up into the large artificial lake. Korda relates: *“I renewed my work with the riding crop, but it had no effect. Mephisto just rolled his eyes, snorted, and shuffled back a few more steps until the water was approaching the top of my boots.”* (p.14) Korda is rescued by the regimental sergeant major of the royal Life Guards out on the bridle paths with his drum horse Clarence. The sergeant has the British reserve and authority that's reminiscent of the days of the British Empire. *“He stared at Mephisto with intense dislike. Disobedience in any form, from man or beast, was, I had no doubt, the thing the RSM liked least, along with tarnished brass or dull leather.”* (p.15) A few harsh words from the sergeant and Mephisto shapes up instantly, much as a recalcitrant schooling horse will react when he sees the instructor coming at him. Besides knowing how to locate food, horses seem to have a natural instinct for knowing who's in command.

Korda was editor in chief at Simon and Schuster, and his job brought him into contact with a number of colorful people. One of these is Jane McIlvaine McClary, a writer who resides in the heart of old Virginia hunt country. McClary honors Korda by including him in the grueling Middleburg Hunt and providing a spirited horse named BlackJack for the occasion. Though we suspect he's being a bit disingenuous — he does survive, after all, — his terror-filled account is hilarious and his exploits earn him the approving epithet, 'a real daredevil', from Jane's friends. Jane, herself, is apologetic. Perhaps she should have provided more exciting entertainment, she laments. She urges him to return and she'll take him on the Rappahannock Hunt, where they'll have some real challenges.

Much later in his career, Korda edits Ronald Reagan's memoir, [An American Life](#). Despite his folksy Western image, Reagan actually preferred to ride English, and enjoyed talking about horses with Korda's

wife, Margaret, who was a successful eventer. Apparently, the British press was dismayed when he showed up in English-style regalia rather than a cowboy outfit to ride with the queen.

Korda, himself, is not an eventer, and although he writes extensively about his wife's efforts and triumphs, his narrative lacks a sense of involvement. His comparison of dressage to ballet doesn't really convey the physical grace and countless hours of training shown by horse and rider. He's a better writer than that, and his account does not do justice to the subject. His mention of stadium jumping seems dismissive. It's not just the third leg of eventing, and therefore a test of the horse's stamina. It requires a level of extreme focus: Getting the line just right, overcoming the aversion many horses have to landing in water, managing speed for a controlled jump that transitions into the short bursts necessary to finish within time limits, negotiating successive barriers that can be dislodged by the touch of a feather, and gauging the stride length that will permit the most expedient approach.

Korda is more at home describing his musings as he trail rides the retiree Star on his farm. *"All this is familiar ground to Star, and like most horses he reacts to even the slightest changes along the way....He remembers things I have hardly even noticed, and the slightest change attracts his attention. Anything that has been moved, repainted, or fallen down attracts his attention...."*(p.363) Here, Korda captures the horse's singular view of the world as closely as we humans are capable of imagining it.

Meghan says

Pretentious? Yes. Hilarious? Absolutely. It is a little bit of 'I'm so rich, and here is my hot girlfriend, and look at our money', but really? It's a funny look at little excerpts from someone who lived a horse-oriented life. From the description of his first instructor, to the terrifying trip around a fox-hunt field.... I found myself laughing along.
