

# Equestrian Drill Teams

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The crowd sits in hushed anticipation, watching the entrance of the arena. In a flurry of hooves, flying tails and uniforms, the equestrian drill team gallops in, bringing a new level of exhilaration and awe to the crowd. These mounted riders work together in perfect sync, matching the beat of the music and maneuvering through patterns that create visual appeal for the spectators. The horses are spectacular and their riders are skillful; hours of practice and experimentation are in this team; entertaining the crowd is their goal.

For those who have witnessed an equine drill team at work, you know that these maneuvers have not come without a lot of heart, and hours of sweat, dedication, and practice. Equine drill teams have existed for years and are rapidly growing in popularity. This complex sport is based on ability, alignment, coordination, timing, originality, attractiveness of pattern, difficulty, speed, horsemanship skills, uniformity, music, and crowd appeal. Without question, the riders must be dedicated in order to achieve a harmonious and stimulating drill team performance. A pattern done flawlessly is enough to raise goose bumps on the skin of a spectator, and cause the crowd to erupt in boisterous applause. These are your riders that seek to entertain. Equestrian drill teams typically can be seen performing at rodeos, horse fairs, benefits, parades, or competitions. Generally, the performance lasts anywhere from a song in length to a few songs; the lyrics are generally meaningful, and the music matches the rhythm of the team.

Although any breed of horse could be used for drill team, you may wonder what makes a horse ideal for this event. The most talented horses contain many valuable qualities such as: patience, calmness, athletic ability, alertness, good temperament, smooth gaits, all-around

talent and coordination. It is helpful to participate on a horse that is well-trained and sensitive to the rider's cues. Understandably, every horse will be different both in personality and appearance. Part of the beauty of the drill team is seeing the different horses gallop in close proximity, maneuvering around each other in splendid patterns, to a perfect tempo.

The Iowa Horse Fair is host to several drill team performances, providing spectators with entertainment amidst the excitement of a horse fair on the state fairgrounds. This year, they welcomed back Two County Dusters Youth Drill Team and Red Rock Riders Equestrian Drill Team. Both teams showcased their hard work and abilities through spectacular performances in the pavilion. The Red Rock Riders got their start just four years ago, and are already blossoming with talent. With Randy Cartwright as their coach, the team consists of twelve young women and their horses that carry them faithfully through countless practices and performances. As for the Two County Dusters, their equestrian team is currently made up of seventeen youth. Both of these dedicated drill teams have performed at fairs, rodeos and shows throughout the years. These equestrians define heart and dedication. The riders enjoy being able to ride year round and improve their horsemanship skills. The Red Rock Riders ride up to twice a week, and two times a month, during



the bitter cold winters. Liz Sample, of Red Rock Riders reports, "Drill team gives me more opportunities to work with my horse and to perfect my technique." Not only are these girls interested in providing quality entertainment, but they are also eager to improve themselves and their horses. As a team, the Red Rock Riders have a goal to compete and place in an upper class drill team competition.

Equestrian drill teams are a great sport to watch or be involved in. Are you a youth interested in being a part of a drill team? A good way to start is by asking your local 4H horse program about drill teams in your area. Two County Dusters are located in Southwest Iowa, near Page and Fremont County. Red Rock Riders are located in Marion County, Iowa. Kirkwood Community College also has an equestrian drill team in their horse program. Aspiring drill team riders should know their horse well, in order to make a harmonious match. Red Rock Rider member Amy Turner advises, "Work with your horse frequently and be a dedicated part of your team." Through all the hard work, friends and memories to last a lifetime will be made. Even if you are too 'old' to be a part of an equestrian drill team, or do not have the interest, you can still support your Iowa teams by cheering them on at equine events. As for the youth interested in taking the step to being a part of a drill team, Hunter McCullough of Red Rock Riders leaves us with this universal truth, "You never know until you try, but it's worth the try!"

