HORSING AROUND

Eleven children ages 6 to 12 learned the basics about horses at a pony day camp last week at the Horses Unlimited barn in South Park Township.

They learned to groom, saddle and bridle a horse, tried the English hunt seat riding style and even did horse-related arts and crafts. Demonstrations by a blacksmith and equine dentist were included in the program at the company's barn off Stoltz Road.

Horses Unlimited has 22 animals, including a donkey, and provides pony rides in South Park and offers riding lessons. Dave and Mary Amoroso started the company in 1995.

Lauren White, 8, of Peters Township, gets a lesson from Mary Amoroso, owner of the Horses Unlimited farm, recently in South Park. Several children from the area took part in a pony day camp at the farm.





Heidi Murrin/Tribune-Review



Heidi Murrin/Tribune-Review

◀ Michael Columbus, 9, of Brentwood, giggles as he trots on a horse, owned by Mary Amoroso, at the farm.

▶ Brooke Ball, 5, of Baldwin, helps to pound a nail into a new horseshoe with farrier Phillip Heidenreich at the farm.

HORSING AROUND

Camp teaches riders the basics

By Meredith Polley

FOR THE TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Katy Minch is convinced she never will get her driver's license.

After test-riding some cars at Kennywood, the 8-year-old Castle Shannon girl has decided that horses should be her main source of transportation.

"If I don't own a herd, I'll just hide one in my garage, like a car," she said. "It'll just be safer

for everyone."

Katy said she can't wait until she can buy her own "mansion barn." For now, she and 11 other horse lovers are at least learning the basics of riding and caring for horses at a week-long camp in South Park.

As part of Dave and Mary Amoroso's second horse-camp session this summer, the children get to ride, bathe, feed and groom the 10 horses and ponies housed in the couple's stable.

By the end of the week, the campers will be able to recognize horse-care equipment, as well as the proper way to wash, brush and bridle a horse. Visits from a blacksmith and a horse dentist will teach the children about cleaning hooves and teeth.

The Amorosos have been holding the camp officially for a few years now but said they long have been aware of children's interest in their animals.

"Everyone always wants a ride or to hang out at the barn," Mary Amoroso said. "They might as well learn, too."

The children range in age and levels of experience. The youngest camper circling the pony ring Monday was only 5½



Philip G. Pavely/Tribune-Review

Mary Amoroso (front right) conducts an instructional ride during horse camp Monday at Horses Unlimited in South Park.

South Park

— she and a few others are taking private riding lessons. Many of the riders, all younger than 11, were returning for a second year.

Whether sporting an actual riding or bicycle helmet, none of the campers could wait for his or her turn to trot around the ring.

Discussing favorite steeds, future equestrian careers and a mutual love of horses, the children only had one complaint about caring for their favorite animals.

"You get used to the smell after about two days," said Michael Columbus, 10, of Brentwood. "Picking up poop is the only bad part."

On the other hand, Michael and Cassie Nadzum, 9, of Brentwood, could quickly agree on their favorite part.

"Tank!" both campers screamed.
"He is the biggest, the strongest

and the coolest," Michael said of the largest and only full-size horse in the Amorosos' barn.

Dave Amoroso said most of the animals they own are trained for such riders and have fairly amiable dispositions. On Monday, the campers rode Star, a horse that has been with Amoroso for about 20 years.

"That's longer than my marriage," he said.

Horses are a full-time job for the Amorosos who, until this summer, also had been giving pony rides around the ring at the South Park Fairgrounds. After missing the deadline for the bidding this year, when the county sent the paperwork to a wrong address, the Amorosos are fighting to regain their spot.

Through their business called Horses Unlimited, the Amorosos still are plenty busy with private lessons and another horse camp in August.

Camp sessions take place from 10 a.m. to about 1:15 p.m. Monday through Thursday. Cost is \$225.

Even if the camp is only four days long, the young riders said they can't get enough of the horses.

Maria Carbonara, 7, of Peters, said she likes being so tall when she's on a horse's back.

Cassie said she loves riding because it's carefree. And Katy said she likes that no rules delay riders while riding horses, unlike vehicles and traffic jams.

Although there may not be many rules, Mary Amoroso is teaching her campers good form and technique. As each rider mounted to ride around the ring, she called instructions.

"Shoulders back. Toes up. Pinkies in. And a big smile."

Meredith Polley is a freelance writer.