

Trainers say girl a natural on a horse

Rides, continued from C1

Her response to the first is simple. That's how she runs here. The second one she thinks she doesn't know the answer to, because she's never known another way of riding.

But Lizzy, who was raised on a horse farm and is the daughter of two accomplished riders, never questioned whether she'd ride.

"I believe I that I can do anything that I set out to do," she's written back. "Maybe I just have to work a little harder or smarter, but this isn't such a hard thing."

Having to rely on her leg strength and verbal cues to get into a rhythm with the horse may have actually made her a better rider — especially when riding broodmares, but in without any ropes or bits she'd be a horse.

"I think she actually over-compensates with the other aids, which is why it's so easy to take the bridle off on her horses. Most riders tend to ride with a pretty heavy hand because they can," says her mother and trainer, Annette Trabaud. "She can't."

"I can," Lizzy jabs off from atop the pony, "but I fall off."

Striving for perfection

This weekend, Lizzy became the youngest performer to ever headline at BreyerFest, a model horse collector festival in Lexington, Ky.

Lizzy grew up on the 100-acre Casonoff farm where her parents, Mark and Annette, bred, board and train horses.

Three years ago, at the Pennsylvania Horse World Expo in Harrisburg, she



Lizzy Trabaud walks Puddles out of the stables at Casonoff farm near Centre Hall.

met Terrence Turvey, whose "Night of Amazing Horses" shows feature him performing feats such as riding standing on two horses — one foot on each animal's back — as they move around a show ring.

Lizzy soon started training with him, and last year she made her debut performance with him at the Florida Horse Expo.

Wearing a cowboy hat, she stands on top of a pony and spins a lasso loop or twirls a lasso, hangs from the side of a pony by one hand or leg or performs comedy stunts like the one in which Turvey launches her over a horse in

a failed attempt to get her into the saddle.

"The job's based on free trouble-jumping onto horses — it's the eye area she struggles, but her skills are well beyond her age level, and Turvey said her awareness is better than most adults."

"She learns by listening. She learns by watching," said Turvey. "She doesn't have to ask a whole lot of questions."

When Turvey showed her how to ride a horse while standing, he didn't have to tell her to keep the left leg planted while moving the right leg for balance, he said. She saw him do it,

she imitated. Not having a left hand doesn't seem to hinder her. She makes adjustments, positioning her body differently if necessary.

"If you just kind of sit back and watch, there is a way to do it. She will figure it out," said Turvey. "There's really nothing she can't do."

Lizzy's practiced riding two of Turvey's horses at one time, standing with one foot on each. She hasn't yet mastered the trick with her own ponies, but Lizzy's become an expert on keeping her legs in two horses while Turvey's equine customers and the more traditional hunter show competitors.

In October, she won the hunter hack class reserve championship at the Pennsylvania State 4-H Horse Show. Elizabeth Solter, the world-champion hunter rider in 1995 and 1996, occasionally works with Lizzy.

Lately, she's focused on getting in rhythm with the horse, and keeping balance and rhythm so that the jumps look perfect.

"She's very mature for her age," Solter said, "and because she can absorb a lot and take a lot in, we can work a little more on the horse and not just her."

The feel to ride

Lizzy rides every day, usually three times during the week and five or six on weekends. During the school year she tries to get her homework done on the bus ride home from Penna Valley Intermediate School, where she'll be a sixth-grader this fall. When she's on the road, her grandmother takes her.

At a recent practice, she worked on three routines

for BreyerFest. As she walked and prepared a pony, she used her left arm to grasp the equipment but did the more detailed work — such as backing a bridle — with her right hand. She rides with a black athletic brace, connected to the reins, on her left arm.

On this day, she performed traditional and elegant jumps with Rosie, a horse that stands 14 hands tall — traditional except she did some without a bridle, using a neck ring to guide her lines. A few of the jumps she did with Rosie were in quick succession, within 30 feet of each other.

Next was Lily, a grey and black pony that's a bit taller than 11 hands (1 hand equals 4 inches) and who Lizzy describes as "yutes," a "little stinker" and "toy baby." Bought at an auction several years ago, the former cart pony is ornery, she says, but not mean.

"He's the first pony I've ever owned, the first pony I've ever jumped, and the first pony to ever throw me over a jump," she said.

In this session she guided the 700-pound pony to sit down, then to lie down on cue. At one point, she used the reins to pull his nose closer to the wall, as a way of making him sit.

"They're definitely stronger than you, so you can't muscle them down — but you can be smarter than them," she said.

For example, she said, when she needs to corral Toby to sit or lie for a longer period of time, she gives him a treat — not so much to reward him, but to distract him.

"When he gets into that sit position, I'm gonna make him think about the food,

so he doesn't think about getting up," she said.

She finished the day with Puddles, the 13-hand white pony that topped the fences.

"The big thing that they're afraid of is the snook, the snook of it," she said.

On days when she does a show, she might have two or three practice sessions with the animals in-cubis there.

"And you put them in front of an audience, you don't know how they're going to react," she said. "I know some that will break out, and some that will be fine."

Toby's an old pro at dealing with the crowds now, but the loud noises and bright lights got to Puddles at a "Night of Amazing Horses" show in Sterling, Ill., earlier this month. It was his and Lizzy's first nighttime show, and Lizzy learned she'd have to break him in more for BreyerFest.

She wants to pursue a career with horses, naturally. She already teaches others at clinics, and posts her latest horing updates through Twitter and blog. She hopes to someday ride in the U.S. Equestrian Federation 10, the PanAmex and the Merid Maedy.

Lizzy she's been focused on a new trick: Doing a back flip off a horse.

She practiced the stunt while at the Illinois festival, but that one's still in the early stages. Still, those who know Lizzy wouldn't be surprised to watch her soon.

"She was born with the feel to ride," said Solter, Lizzy's occasional horse instructor. "That's something that you really can't teach."

Ed Mahon can be reached at 201-4615.