

YOUNG HORSEMEN

California Dreams

Learning vaquero traditions gives the Vincze sisters a reason to ride.

Story and photography by JENNIFER DENISON

RIDING HORSES IS A FUN PASTIME, but it's even more enjoyable when you can do it with family members. California sisters Grace and Gabriella Vincze have grown up riding, thanks to the encouragement of their grandmother Judy Avera, who lives in Arizona.

"I started riding when I was about 2 years old, as did my sisters [Grace and Isa]," says Gabriella. "I remember visiting my grandparents and coming home and saying, 'Mom, I have to ride horses. That was so fun!'"

A few years ago, Grace started studying with California bridle horseman Bruce Sandifer after meeting him with her grandmother.

"I've always followed my grandmother's lead and what she's doing with horses," says Grace. "It's because of Bruce I've come so far in my horsemanship. I look up to him and have so much respect for him. I've experienced different riding styles, but nothing ever felt right like the Californio style does."

For the past two years Grace and Judy both have competed at the Early Californios Skills of the Rancho in Santa Maria, California. Last year Grace won the Junior Ranch Horse Two-Rein class, and Judy won the Novice Ranch Horse Hackamore class.

Gabriella, who rides as often as she can and volunteers at All in Stride, a therapeutic riding program, wants to show at the "Skills" this year. Both girls would like to own their own Iberian horses someday, but now they are enjoying the experience they gain from working with different horses, owned by their grandmother, Sandifer or friends.

"I'm not in a big hurry to have my own horse," says Grace. "Riding so many different horses in my life is really helping me learn and grow as a rider. When I have the opportunity to introduce horses to the Californio style, it amazes me how naturally they respond."

While competing is a good way to test a rider's skills, Grace says it is not her main focus, and she has goals well beyond competition.

"I want to continue to learn this style of riding and teach it to others who want to learn," she says. "It's my intent to do my part to keep this tradition alive."

NAMES: Grace and Gabriella Vincze

AGE: 15, 13

HOMETOWN: Thousand Oaks, California

ASSOCIATIONS: Californio Bridlehorse Association

EVENTS: Youth ranch horse classes

HOBBIES: In addition to riding horses, Grace plays volleyball and Gabriella is in a water polo club.

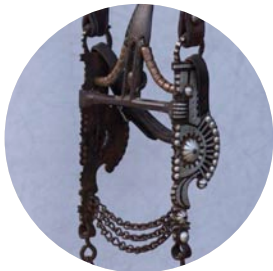


Grace won the two-rein ranch horse competition at the Early Californios Skills of the Rancho last summer riding her grandmother's Andalusian named Bolt.



Sisters Grace and Gabriella Vincze have found their horsemanship niche in the Californio style.

Do you know a young Western horseman or horsewoman worthy of a spotlight? Send your suggestion to edit@westernhorseman.com with "Young Horsemen" in the subject line.



FAVORITE PIECE OF GEAR:

Spade bit

TOP OF THE PLAYLIST:

Grace's favorite song is "Comfortably Numb" by Pink Floyd, and Gabriella's top songs are "(Don't Fear) the Reaper," by Blue Oyster Cult and "Angel in Blue Jeans" by Train.



OFTEN-USED EMOJI:

Grace uses the laughing face, and Gabriella likes the diamond.

FAVORITE SUBJECTS:

Both girls excel in math and history.



DOWNTIME PASTTIMES:

They enjoy hanging out at the beach. "Going to the mall never made sense to me," says Grace.

DREAM CAREER:

Gabriella wants to be a large-animal veterinarian, while Grace says she's still deciding.