

GTH Junior Riders - for the love of the game

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Global Team Horse Racing recently trialled GTH Junior Riders at a fun event held at the Equidome Indoor Equestrian Arena in Beaulieu, Midrand on the 22nd May 2022...



As this was the first time for the concept, access was limited and the event was used to gather feedback and to establish if this was something that would get the support of parents.

The skill level of riders was broad, from novices who had never ridden before, to experienced kids that had been riding for years.

The day clearly illustrated that GTH Junior Riders is a good way to get kids involved in the sport, without requiring any specific training or without having to own a horse. The intention of the program is to build a bond between horses and the kids, with the horse being the hero. The focus on fun ensures that the kids are not intimidated, with a view to leading to a love for equestrian related events, like dressage, jumping or just riding.

In the lead up to the event, some of the participants had the opportunity to meet some of South Africa's best jockeys, ride a simulator and visit the starting gates to experience what it is like on a big race day.

"This was such a positive experience for my son," enthused Heather Miller, mother of Finley, "He is an experienced rider, but there is no doubt that the program improved his riding and even though there is a competitive element to the event, the day finished with Finley having established many new friendships."

The team format makes it a lot more fun for kids of all ages and skill levels. Sunday's event had two teams competing, over six races, with four ponies per race and all the participants had three or four opportunities to race. Adding to the atmosphere, was the live commentary during the races by Alistair Cohen.

GTH Junior Riders will follow a similar format as the GTH live series, meaning that the kids can relate to the race day with their "lived" experience. Experiencing the challenges, albeit on a smaller scale, is sure to breed respect for the jockeys,

who are often the unsung heroes of horse racing.

"We were delighted with the reaction of the parents," said Angus Campbell, who heads up GTH in South Africa, "there is no doubt that this is a positive way of building a love for the sport and offering children an alternative to some of the traditional sports. The compact nature of the event suits the short attention spans of a younger generation and places GTH racing in the same category of action-packed sporting entertainment like T20 cricket and sevens rugby!"

"Horse racing has always been associated with betting and gambling, but as GTH is a non-gambling product, it means that we are able to attract a younger audience, just as kids participate in soccer, rugby or cricket extra murals," comments Campbell.

The general feeling after the event was that everybody's expectations had been exceeded and that the day ended too soon.

Campbell commented; *"Participating in a sport grows your interest as a spectator, as you have a deeper understanding of the skills required to be successful at it. It is our goal to increase the support for horse racing by opening up the opportunity for all age-appropriate youth to participate."*

Announcements regarding the GTH Junior Riders will be made in due course and information will be available on the website at www.gthracing.co.za.

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