

American Saddlebred Association of Maine Leading the Way

Submitted by Rick Drew, ASAM

The American Saddlebred Association of Maine believes in calculated risk taking. Their calculations have benefited the Maine horse community. In fact, the benefits stretch well beyond the borders of Maine.

Strengthened by an incredible promotions push, ASAM not only gets the word out, it gets the job done. This is a group that does not seem to rest on any laurels. Taking an in-depth view of the association, one finds a dedicated bunch that looks for new and strong ideas every year.

Example 1 of this can be found in the ASAM Clinic. Three years ago, ASAM flew in Annalisa Hall in an effort to put on their first clinic. Her plane came from Kansas City but she had some Maine roots and the clinic drew well. Hall had done the clinic to give back to the community that supported her for years. The clinic was a great success and gave organizers Rick Drew and Theresa Guillemette a solid footing for the future.

Last year, ASAM brought in Missy Hughes from DeLovely Farm. There, she worked with the esteemed Lillian Shively. We all know you do not receive rings for World Championships in this venue, but if you did, it would be difficult for anyone at DeLovely to hold the reins. The ASAM-Hughes Clinic sold out.

ASAM is broadening the clinic for 2008 by extending it to two days. People asked for Missy to come back immediately. Usually this is something not done as different clinicians bring in more people. When you have the same clinician back-to-back years, the attendance tends to drop. However, such is not the case with the Hughes-ASAM combination. Not only has ASAM extended the event to two days, it is a strong possibility that it will split the venue. Day one will be at the High Stepping Equestrian Center in Maine, and look for Day two to be held at a premiere stable in Massachusetts.

According to clinic organizers, there were many people who traveled hours to have the chance to ride under Hughes. ASAM wants to be able to make it easier for other New Englanders to attend. This will give an opportunity in Maine for the core membership with day two meaning less travel for other New Englanders.

A look at the ASAM Long Horn Fun Festival Horse Show is another great example of ASAM leading. Banquets have become so expensive to attend for members, ASAM was looking for a way to keep their banquet at a high quality without emptying the checkbooks of its members. The fun show was created. April of 2008 will bring the third year of this event that started as a fundraiser and has become so much more. The event awarded ASAM points only to a few classes. This rewarded the members who attended. There were no other affiliations and the majority of classes were fun and game events. No show clothes were allowed.

The first year the show raised enough money that the ASAM Banquet charged \$5 for a junior member and \$10 for a senior member. The menu did include prime rib, among four other main dishes. The ASAM Banquet attendance grew in one year by an increase of 54 percent. The show did not seek class sponsors as ASAM has their spring show less than a month later and didn't want to overkill their members. Long Horn Supply signed on as the major sponsor and Wright Way Stables has been an affiliate sponsor each year. The show has grown and will actually affiliate with MHA in 2008 as a D rated show. The affiliation is to reward the ASAM members who support the show as most are MHA members and will appreciate the point opportunity.

This leads us to yet another example of ASAM leading the way. The ASAM Spring Horse Show is held a mere three weeks after their Fun Show. However, it offers an entirely different aspect for exhibitors. The class list is varied. The atmosphere remains fun. However, it has been the only Maine show to offer double judging year after year. It has been an NEHC and MHA affiliated show for years. In 2008, it will upgrade from an MHA rated C show to a B rated show. The increase means more MHA points available per class to exhibitors. Double judging of this show keeps the class cost at one entry fee but extends two chances for points and ribbons.

The ASAM Summer Show has been held for 33 years, of which the last ten have been at the Skowhegan Fairgrounds. Show Manager Jo Hight admits that holding it in Skowhegan has lost ASAM some of their exhibitors of years long ago as it is a two-hour drive into Maine. However, as the fairgrounds have upgraded their facility year after year, the trip does not seem so bad for all of the travelers from out of state. The show promotes itself as exhibitor-friendly, offering events in and out of the ring for all to enjoy. It has been exactly that. In today's economy, if a show can increase its exhibitors by 25 percent from one year to the next, it has been highly successful. This show did that in 2007. The ASAM Summer Show is a three-day event affiliated with MHA, NEHC and many other clubs throughout Maine and New England.

ASAM also tiers their points system to promote their shows. Their Long Horn Fun Festival Horse Show awards ASAM club points. The Spring Show offers double points for each pinning. If each judge awards an exhibitor the blue in the same class, that exhibitor earns four times the normal points. The ASAM Summer Show offers triple ASAM club points for each placing.

Thinking outside the box is an often-used promotion in today's world. Acting outside the box is something many are fearful of attempting. Not ASAM. Not this group. ASAM has been working outside the box long before people knew thinking outside the box even existed. ASAM's future looks bright.