

Good Footing For All

By Kim F. Miller

Premier Equestrian brings international caliber riding surfaces to at-home horsekeepers.



Premier Equestrian is doing for horse owners what Henry Ford did for Americans 100 years ago. In Ford's case, it was "a car in every garage." In Premier's case, it's good footing in every arena, not just those of the rich and famous.

"We've been instrumental in educating backyard and private owners on how to do their footing at an unbelievably economical price," explains Premier's Heidi Zorn.

The Utah company sells footing material, but what it gives away, education, is equally important. Free analysis of existing arena sand is the first step in what Heidi describes as a relatively simple process. Answers to some basic questions — "What kind of riding do you do? What kind of arena do you have? What are its problems and how can we fix them?" shape the plan for building or refurbishing an arena.

When textile footing materials first came to America, there was a perception that it could only be used with specific types of sand. Premier's staff of engineers has proven otherwise. "Once we know what kind of sand they have — meaning its particle size and shape — we can come up with a formula that will make it work in most cases," Heidi explains. That often means refurbishing existing sand, or at least a lot of it, rather than the expense of starting from scratch.

The company manufactures and distributes several types of textile footings. Its own ProTex™ is designed for arenas that get the light use typical at private or small training stables, and it's ideal for those

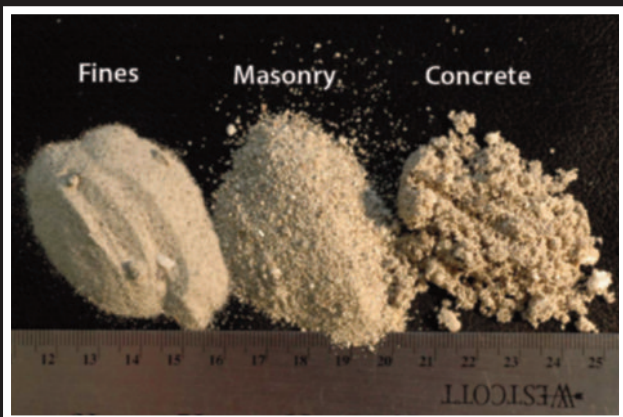


Olympian, Adrienne Lyle, competing with her horse, Wizard, at the Del Mar National Horse Show.

on a modest budget. Master's Blend adds cushioning rubber to the performance-enhancing stability of textile. Their new SandAid product will stabilize most types of sand and refurbish a worn out surface. All these products are delivered in blends custom made for an arena's existing sand and they represent just a small fraction of the footing options available through Premier.

Coupled with free consultation and detailed and easy-to-follow instructions for do-it-yourself installation, Premier is able to put a \$6,000 to \$10,000 price tag on a new or fully refurbished arena. That's considerably better than what can be \$50,000 to \$80,000 bills from arena builders.

Premier recognized that private farms were not being served and took it upon themselves to fill that niche. Education is a huge reason for Premier's success. Premier-produced YouTube videos that explain all aspects of what goes into identifying and creating the right riding surfaces for various disciplines are one example of the company's educational efforts.



Understanding the needs and preferences of at-home horsekeepers and riders was easy for Heidi, Premier's founder, because she is one herself as an accomplished amateur dressage competitor. Her first epiphanies about the impact of footing came from the saddle, when a dressage mount moved bold and beautiful on a "perfect grass surface," but became a different horse in the arena. "He sucked back and was anxious and unconfident," she relays.

The experience set Heidi on a path of intense education regarding everything arenas. Sand, dirt, drainage, maintenance and base were among the areas of study that poised her company to respond to increasing demand for good footing.

Recognition of the connection between riding surface and horse health and performance began about 20 years ago in Europe, Heidi says. It came to the U.S. shortly thereafter, first as the belief that good footing meant the cushioning effect of deep sand. But the effort required to maneuver in deep sand led to an increase in soft tissue injuries. That triggered a search for footing that offered cushion, but without the slide – something like the give and stability of deeply rooted grass. Good footing Heidi explains, simulates exactly that, with the result that horses ride "on top of it, more than *in* it."

Equine instincts and biomechanics are key factors in the relationship between footing and performance. For a wild horse, "If you fall down, you get eaten," Heidi notes. "So, if the surface is wiggly and unstable, your horse is not going to give you as much as if he felt stable." International level competitors in Europe were the first to boycott events that did not have suitable footing and the trickle-down effect is that "regular" riders have a much-improved sense of how footing impacts their horses and they make it a priority in their horsekeeping practices and show choices.

The escalation of horse prices has also put a premium on protecting that investment. Even competitive equestrians spend most of their time training at their home stables, and thus recognize that the cost of installing footing from Premier Equestrian has years' worth of rewards in their horses' well-being and performance.

Last but not least, Premier has a terrific reputation for super-serving its customers and the company's support of equestrian support is as ubiquitous as its footing.



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Premier Equestrian is the official arena of the USEF and USDF.