



# CHELSEA EDSALL

Drawing from her own horse life, this California horsewoman creates special events and rides for people to make the most of their time with horses.

INTERVIEW AND PHOTOGRAPH BY JENNIFER DENISON

**F**ull of energy and quick-witted comments, Chelsea Edsall has a zest for life, horses and the people who own and ride them. Those qualities serve her well as the business and marketing manager for a private equestrian center on the 20,000-acre Santa Lucia Preserve in Carmel, California. Nestled on two old Mexican Land Grants—El Potrero San Carlos and the San Francisquito—the Preserve was operated for years as a working cattle ranch. With the support of her primarily female staff, Chelsea coordinates the care of the stabled horses, plans special equestrian-related events, and develops relationships with members and potential new members while attending National Reined Cow Horse Association events with her husband, trainer Clayton Edsall. | The daughter of a successful hunter-jumper rider, Chelsea grew up in Linden, California, riding English horses. A few years after graduating from California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo, she found her passion guiding trail rides at the Preserve. A year later, in 2011, she became manager of the equestrian center. After taking time off to stay home with her two children—Weston, 6, and Rylee, 4—and do consulting, she returned to her role full time a few years ago, while also managing her husband’s cow horse training business. | To some, the 38-year-old horsewoman is best known for her humorous takes on showing horses in her YouTube video series *Cheers! It’s Chelsea*.

**Anything you could imagine** doing with horses as a kid, I get to make it happen at the Preserve. I get to live out those dreams through the eyes of other kids. My kids sometimes get to tag along.

**I worked in produce sales** and business development right out of college for four years. I had just received a promotion when one of my mentors—who had recently been diagnosed with cancer—came by my cubicle and congratulated me. He said, ‘Now you get to stare at two computer screens for six days a week for the rest of your life. Do what you want to do. Think about it, life’s too short.’ Then, shortly after, he took his own life. What he said really stuck with me. So, I took a job as a wrangler [at the Preserve]. It was a huge pay cut, but the rewards were also huge.

**One of our best employees** got a job working [as an assistant trainer] for Clayton. I told him he couldn’t leave, that this Clayton Edsall guy sounds terrible. He went anyway, and they came into town for the [California Rodeo Salinas], where Clayton was showing in the bridle classes. They came up to the equestrian center, and I was in the barn trying to learn to rope with an old rope someone had left in the tack room. Clayton said, “You’re trying to learn with that rope?” A week later, a brand-new rope showed up with a note from Clayton that said, “I’d love to teach you to rope.”

**The first time I saw Clayton ride**, I thought he had the most incredible horsemanship. Then I talked to him and learned he was a real cowboy that wanted to improve at showing horses. I thought he could improve on his business and showmanship,

so I imposed some of my ideas on him and he saw his business change and more people take interest. We make a great team. He doesn’t like to promote himself, but I have no problem talking about him because I believe in him and see how hard he works.

**After Clayton won** the World’s Greatest [Horseman in 2016] on Skeets Oak Peppy, I took over

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“WHEN YOU’VE BEEN INVOLVED WITH HORSES YOUR WHOLE LIFE AND THEN YOU GET OUT OF IT FOR A WHILE, IT EVENTUALLY PULLS YOU BACK IN.”

the horse and set a goal to show again. I ended up winning the non-pro limited world championship at the 2021 NRCHA Celebration of Champions. Now I’m taking a big break from showing.

**Helping members and their horses** progress and stay safe, and get the most out of horse ownership keeps me coming back—and getting to plan events and watch young riders grow up with horses.

**We’ve gradually introduced** reined cow horse to the equestrian center members. It’s been a big change not just seeing trail riders and people out here for pleasure, but now they’re entering shows and starting to compete or own show horses.

**Making the non-pro videos** is my outlet for fun, and people have been so supportive. Sometimes in the horse business you can’t joke around much, but I think I have very good insight as to what a non-pro, a horse owner, a trainer and a stall cleaner goes through on a daily basis because I’ve done most of those things.

**One of my predecessors** at the Preserve was [the late] Leslie Dorrance. To see her balance everything and manage this place inspired me to do a good job and do right by her and myself. She believed in me and put her stamp of approval on me, and I wanted to make her proud. 

