

Western Retailers Learn to Speak English; English Retailers Find Western Niche

They want it, and now you've got it. Expanding your store across riding disciplines proves your commitment to customer service. Even before riders ask for a discipline you didn't represent, you recognize the need to broaden product lines.

Crossing

By Charlene Strickland, English Editor

How do you know when to augment your store's merchandise? How do you branch out beyond your chosen specialty? Three retailers who have successfully crossed over have agreed to share their expertise.

Oklahoma: Where the English Tack Demand Grows Like the Corn

The equestrian community changed, and Dee Black at Circle E decided she should change with it.

Dee Black calls Oklahoma "the heart of horse country." She began observing a switch from Western to English in recent years.

"The farms that surround us, they're hunter-jumper, saddle seat, 4-H programs and even a POA farm," said Black. "Twenty years ago, I wouldn't have described the neighborhood like that."

She expanded her store from 2,000 to 9,500 square feet and began carrying hunt seat supplies and apparel five years ago.

Helmets launched Circle E's transition away from Western only. It all began with requests from a therapeutic riding facility near the store.

"We sold a lot of riding helmets," Black said. "That was our first item to carry. From that you could see the need—we need to get pants, get English bridles and bits."

The move made sense.

"There are not that many places somebody can just run and get a show shirt or helmet," Black said. "Once the kids hit five, they start to

ride and right off the bat need pants, boots and a helmet."

Knowing the industry has been a key for Black.

"I find what works best is the minute they come in the door, I ask, 'Who do you ride with?'" said Black. "I am on a first-name basis with all the trainers. Know your farms, know your clients, know your trainers. With that comes some really nice people."

Black also stays in tune with the market through her 13-year-old daughter, who switched from "boring" riding in circles to hunter-jumper.

"I got really lucky," Black said. "I had a daughter who wanted to go into it. That made me look really smart."

Her products come from a variety of sources.

"I love JPC," she said. "They carry quality stuff at a reasonable price. Weaver Leather has gone into carrying English, good-quality leather at a middle-of-the-road price range.

Right—Dee Black of Circle E in Oklahoma found that riders in her area were leaning more and more toward English products and followed the trend in her retail operation.

