



Pregnancy and Show Jumping

Emma Carville

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Pregnancy can be a different experience for each woman; working in the show jumping community and around horses while pregnant poses a different kind of challenge. Shannon Haney, Lynne Stephenson and Tina Watkins – each involved in the horse business professionally – all had different experiences with their pregnancies and how it influenced their day-to-day lives.

Tina Watkins is an equine body worker by trade. She is a big part of health and wellness programs for a lot of people in Alberta, and she also rides competitively herself. Tina normally breeds one or two horses each year and also competes her own mare at a high level of dressage. Several years ago when Tina was pregnant, she was faced with the decision of whether to continue riding and working. “I stopped riding a week before I gave birth”, Tina explained. “I definitely slowed down in my business, until 10 days or so before hand.”

Some pregnant riders experience difficulty staying balanced because of the extra weight towards the front of their body. “You can’t have 30 pounds hanging off the front of you and not expect it to affect your riding,” joked Tina. Although Tina also adds that the weight increases slowly, so it’s easier to adapt.

Tina says that she was lucky during her pregnancy and was able to return to work after taking about a month off. She emphasized the importance of having a good support system at home to allow that to happen. “My husband is more than 50% dad,” she says.

Shannon Haney also kept riding throughout her pregnancy, only stopping one week before she gave birth. Shannon is a hunter and jumper rider and trainer, and she did stop jumping horses around the five-month mark, but continued to flat horses fairly regularly until nearly the end of her pregnancy. For Shannon, the first few months of pregnancy took some getting used to. “I had a lot of dizziness but not a lot of balance issues,” Shannon explained.

“I had an unplanned C-section, after trying naturally, but I had a really fast recovery,” she adds. “It’s important to know your own body and follow the advice of your Doctor.”

It has been noted that some riders can lose their ‘edge’ after they have a child, but for Shannon it was just the opposite. Shannon was back in the saddle just six weeks after her son was born, and even moved up a division almost right away with her horse. “I’m a firm believer of making it work for you and not going by the dictation of what standard says. To be totally fair I had a really incredibly good pregnancy, I am the exception to the rule!”

Alberta professional Lynne Stephenson didn’t even know she was pregnant with her second child until she started feeling slightly off balance including while riding. Lynne stopped riding at the three-month mark, saying, “I didn’t want to risk anything, it wasn’t worth it to me.”



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Now that her kids are older, Lynne says that they don't come to the horse shows with her, but it is important to support her kids' endeavors. "I find now they have their own interests. As a parent I need to support those interests, and that can be hard to juggle with the 30 athletes in the barn that I also need to support. I often say I spend more time with other people's children than I do with my own!"

These three horsewomen had their own individual experiences with pregnancy, and followed different paths with their riding careers during and after pregnancy. They all, however, insist on the importance of a good support team at home and at the stable to make it all work – the world of horses never seems to afford any time off, nor do children for that matter!