



Photos by Robert Walton /Garnet &Black

Lisa Dunwoody, above, and Sara Stephens, below, are members of USC's Equestrian Team. The team practices at Softwinds Farm of Hopkins.

USC's Equestrian Team is

Jumping to Success

By Angela Shepherd
staff writer

On Feb. 9, the University of South Carolina Equestrian Team finished third at a University of Georgia competition and remains in second place in regional standings.

The team of 25 women, which became a varsity team in June 1996, competes against seven other teams in 10 regular season regional competitions.

Riders on the team represent a wide range of experience levels.

"From dead beginner to those who have been riding all their life," Skip Brown, assistant coach, said.

In one competition, riders draw the name of the horses they will ride just before a show.

"[We] don't know anything about it except what's on the poster," senior Leslie McDill said.

McDill, who has been riding since age 7, said she feels very fortunate that USC is supporting the team as a varsity sport.

This strenuous sport requires each rider to take at least two lessons and work out at least twice in the stadium gym every week, as well as maintain a certain GPA and follow other NCAA standards, Brown said.

"Everyone really gets along and helps each other," senior team member Shelby Lowden said.

In the Intercollegiate Horse Show Association, member schools take turns hosting and supplying horses for competitions, and Softwinds Farm has been the home of the USC team since 1985.

At the end of each season, the team with the highest point total becomes regional champion and goes on to zone competitions.

Since it began as the Equestrian Club in 1984, the USC team has only finished below regional reserve champion once. In 1995, the team was reserve zone champion and placed seventh in the national competition. They won the zone championship in 1994. In the invitational competition of the nation's top 20 teams, USC finished sixth twice and seventh this past December.

Each show is divided into eight divisions, ranging from Beginner Walk/Trot to Open Fences, in which judges score the performance of the riders. In classes on the flat, judges ask riders to demonstrate gaits. Classes over fences typically jump 10 fences set in a particular pattern, with heights ranging from 2 feet 6 inches to 3 feet 3 inches, McDill said.

"The pattern at invitational was very difficult."

