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**JESSICA COOK GALLOPS** a horse Monday morning at the State Fair Park horse track. Cook exercises 10 or 11 horses a day for a number of different owners and trainers.

# Equestrian exercises

## UNL student rides horses to prepare them for racing

BY **DARREN IVY**  
 Co-editor

Each morning, while most college students are still dreaming, senior animal science major Jessica Cook is already up and doing what she loves — exercising and riding race horses. Four hours a day, seven days a week, beginning at 6 a.m., Cook shows up at the State Fair Park horse track and begins her day — a routine that changes each daily depending on how the horses are feeling and when they are racing. But one thing that never changes is Cook's consistency. "I think I've missed three mornings all summer," said the 24-year old from Lincoln. Cook's dedication and work ethic are two things that Omaha horse owner and trainer Larry Morton likes about her. "I can't say a bad thing about her," Morton said. "She is very prompt and very courteous, and in this sport those are two important things. Some guys you can't count on to show up, but you sure can count on her." Morton credits Cook for turning one of his horses into a winner.

Since Calling Jonesy began working with Cook earlier this season, the horse has run three races and won them all. "Ninety-four percent of that is due to Jessica," Morton said. "She doesn't just go run the horses around in circles and then come back and say, 'where's my money?' She really works them and does exactly as I say." It shouldn't be a surprise that Cook is a horse enthusiast. She comes from a horse racing family. Her father served as the head of investigation at the track while she was growing up, and she began riding when she was 10 years old. Then a year later, her father married a woman who was an exercise rider at the track. "That's when I knew I wanted to be a rider," Cook said. But a person has to be 17 years old before they can gallop horses. She also had to work her way up to being a rider by cleaning out stalls and grooming horses. Currently she gallops horses in the mornings and takes the horses to the gates before races Thursday through Sunday. "It gets in your blood," Cook said.

"You can't get away from it. It's an addiction." Cook markets herself to the trainers and owners by going around to them each morning and asking them if they have horses for her to ride. She has been exercise riding for a year and a half and now commands \$6 per horse. When Cook started out last year, she said she galloped five or six horses each morning. Now she does 10 or 11 a day. "Everything is so busy," Cook said. "You go from one barn to next, and you are always riding different horses and doing different things." But the thing Cook likes best is the connection between horse and rider. "It's a partnership," she said. "You have to gel along with them." As for her future, the horse races end on Sunday, and she plans to return to school and finish up her degree in animal science. After that, she plans to do some traveling to horse racing tracks outside of Nebraska. Morton said whatever Cook decides to do in the future she will be successful. "We need more people like Jessica," Morton said. "She sure makes good use of her time."

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Editors Jennifer Walker  
 Darren Ivy, 472-1766  
 Art Director Matthew D. Haney  
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 Advertising Manager Nick Patsch  
 Asst. Advertising Manager Andrea Oeljen  
 Publication Board Chair Jessica Hofmann,  
 466-8404  
 Professional Advisor Don Walton, 473-7301

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## On the Cover

MIKE WARREN/DN  
**NEBRASKA FOOTBALL** Head Coach Frank Solich surveys the field where the freshmen of the 1998 recruiting class are practicing. Freshmen football practice began Tuesday and the rest of the team will report today, with full team practices beginning Saturday.