

# Sheila Varian

## 2008 V6 Ranch Trail Ride Clinician

The 2008 AHA V6 Ranch Trail Ride is proud to present Sheila Varian, horsewoman, breeder, trainer, and owner of Varian Arabians, as this year's special guest and clinician. Sheila is the cousin of Jack Varian, owner of the V6 Ranch.

Since starting Varian Arabians in 1952, Sheila has bred close to 900 horses. Horses with Varian blood, many carrying the Varian "V," make up 70 percent of horses winning today. Just last year at the 2006 Scottsdale Arabian Horse Show, 54 Championships and Reserves were earned by Varian Arabians or their offspring. Varian's breeding program is nationally and internationally known for its quality of horse.

Varian's horse expertise has been honored in many ways. Sheila is a four-time recipient of the Arabian Horse Trust Breeder Award, and a recipient of the Arabian Breeders Association Lifetime Breeders Award. In 2001, she received the Ellen Scripps David Memorial Breeder's Award from USA Equestrian. Varian was the original Director of the Arabian Professional Horseman Association and now serves as Director and co-founder of the Arabian Breeders Association.

Another of the crowning moments in Sheila's life was her induction into the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame in 2003. She joined icons such as Annie Oakley, Patsy Cline, Dale Evans and artist Georgia O'Keeffe: women who have distinguished themselves while exemplifying the pioneer spirit of the American West. "Sheila is a fine example of... the 'cowgirl spirit,'" says museum curator Jennifer Nielsen. Varian was the first Arabian horse breeder to earn this accolade.



Desperado V and Sheila Varian

Sheila is also well-known as one of only a handful of people in the United States with expert knowledge of traditional "vaquero" history, tack and training methods. Today, vaquero tack—saddles, ornate silver bits, spurs and stirrups crafted by highly skilled artisans—are highly valued for their beauty and historical significance. "Most of this equipment hangs in museums and private collections. I use this traditional tack everyday on the ranch," says Varian.

Sheila learned how to train bridle horses as a young girl. While still in her teens Sheila learned from Sid (Mary) Spencer, the owner of a ranch in Lopez Canyon, California, about training hackamore horses and spade bit horses and how to work cattle in the mountains. In the mid 1960s Tom Dorrance, renowned horseman and mentor to all the best clinicians of today, became friends with Sheila. It was Tom who introduced her to his now universal "soft approach," which has had the most influence on Varian and the way she trains and interacts with her horses.

With a firm foundation in horsemanship, Sheila has trained English, Western, and halter horses for the show ring. However, her ranch horses—the horses she has taught to rope off of, hobble, high line and cross rough country in a quick, safe manner with a soft rein—are the ones she schools and enjoys as her own personal horses. Varian has given many vaquero presentations to historical societies and other interested groups around the country, and continues to practice these techniques with her horses.

These days, the “Golden Girl” Varian spends much of her time at her beautiful ranch and state of the art breeding facility in the mountains north of Arroyo Grande, California. The V6 ranch is owned by Sheila’s cousin, Jack, and she likes nothing better than coming down to work on the ranch and visit with family. Luckily for us, we are invited along to share all the joys of the ranch, from trail riding, to working the cows, and of course, storytelling around the campfire with friends, new and old.

Sheila and Lightly Bey V, one of her  
ranch horses



*For more information about Sheila Varian visit [www.varianarabians.com](http://www.varianarabians.com)*