

I Like to be Right

By Christine Amber

I don't like to lose. It doesn't feel good. I don't really like competition. It's not that I am not motivated to excel, because I enjoy learning, I love knowledge, I like putting effort toward things that are rewarding and I like to be right. My husband would say I love to be right, but that's a different article.

When I got back into horses, it always surprised me when people would say, "What do you do with your horses?" I'd think, "Feed them? Ride them? What do you mean, "What do I DO with them?" "Oh, do I SHOW



The author jumping in a three day event.

them?"

The truth is I have my horses because they make me feel good. I talk to them in little voices. It's called "mommy speak," so I understand. Analytically, I think being with my horses—taking care of them, chatting to them, watching them, riding them, scratching on them, training them—alters my brain chemistry and gives me some kind of endorphins, not unlike a runner's high. They make me feel good. Is that selfish?

I use them in my work; they teach people about their kind. But, I do show them, as well. The shows I enjoy are objective they are not so much competitive with other people, but more with a clock and how well I can perform tasks against a clock. Whether I win or not, I get meaningful feedback about my performance.

Last article, I said I would delve into the hunter/jumper world. Jumper's is a competition of height against the clock. Hunters is less objective and more of a stylized way of riding and presenting a horse over jumps.

I barely scratched the surface ex-

ploring the prize list for the Sept 27 – 30th, 2007 Woodside Fall Finale (www.langershows.com/pdf/shows). Entry fees ranged from \$10.00 for the Children's Leadline class to \$250.00 for the Jumper Classic. There were 603 class listings. This is big business.

Behind the scenes, training stables rent portable barns complete with matching tack trunks, draped awnings in barn colors and sod lawns manicured with water fountains and blossoming gardens. Someone could write a complete article about how hunter jumper shows are rated, "A", "B" or "C", how all of the different divisions, rules and regulations apply, and how points are calculated and medals and championships won. I think, however, that I better understand the job of a hunter/jumper trainer. If this is the kind of showing one wants to do, they will need a competent trainer to explain everything and help to buy the right horse and then to train it.

One of my neighbor's has the good sense and good fortune to know

and work with a trainer just like that. The trainer's name is, John French. He has an impressive resume, online at waldenbrookfarm.com/about.htm, and it includes many accolades, championships, and international presence in Hunters and Jumpers. In his Jumping career John French has represented the US in the Nations Cup and World Cup and has been an alternate for the 2004 Olympics. This year in May, at the famous Devon Horse Show in Pennsylvania, he won two Championships and was awarded the honor of 2006 Rider of the Year by the National Show Hunter Hall of Fame at the Annual Awards dinner. I met with John and my neighbors at Sovereign Farm to get an up close and personal picture of a part of the hunter/jumper world.

What does John do? Beside being an accom-

plished rider and trainer he has the knack for selecting horses and helping them become successful in the show ring. Karen, one of the owners of Sovereign Farm is British. She learned all about horses and riding through the highly organized and internationally recognized British Horse Society. She was taught all the correct angles of a horse's body, proper conformation, and form to function. She says it's amazing how he can spot the diamond in the rough over the well polished, perfect looking second rate prospect.

Of his own accomplishments, John said riding in the Jumper world in Europe became so focused on the single horse, the single day, the number of points one had that too many people would lose sight of what riding is supposed to be about. "Riding is about the horses, making them improve, making people happy and helping them with and sharing in their accomplishments".

I asked John what was the hardest part of his job. He said it is when people have an unrealistic idea of what their horse is worth. He gave an example of some owners who turned down an offer

of \$250,000.00 for their horse because they thought they could get more. In the end they got less. However, John emphasized, it wasn't really just about the money; his enjoyment was in the development, the betterment, the time and improvement of making an athletic equine star. He said his favorite horse right now is a young three-year old that he picked out as a baby and is becoming



Here is one of the barn's workers performing dust control. Yes, that is a sponge and a bucket. A diligent hard worker, doing his best to improve the appearance of his employer and demonstrating why barns like this win so many blue ribbons. It is the effort.

a stunning horse, and a beautiful mover. He said it is still like part of a dream come true.

Gordon, Karen's husband and Sovereign co-owner, talked about one horse where he made a \$100,000.00 profit buying and selling. What started out as three horses as family hobby has turned into a 23+ horse breeding, importing and training business. After he told me about the profit I asked him, "But, is your horse business profitable?" He said, "Not yet." I believe him.

He also told me about a horse they owned which had required over \$25,000.00 in vet bills for a lameness problem. Gordon and Karen really enjoy the show world. They enjoy the camaraderie of John's clients and vicarious pleasure of watching John ringside with a horse they have seen him bring along, or maybe even had a chance to ride and seeing that horse competing and winning.

They don't like to lose, it doesn't feel good, they are motivated to excel, and enjoy learning. They love knowledge. They enjoy putting effort toward things that are rewarding, and I like to be right. □



Beautifully groomed and polished horses and riders wait at the in gate for their chance at a ribbon, while a groom, soft polishing cloth in hand, scurries around to skim the dust from the glossy coat of a lovely black horse.