

Local TALENT

*Riders from Racing Families
Shine in Other Disciplines*

By Jeannie Blancq Putney

Thoroughbred racing is to Kentucky what the Eiffel Tower is to Paris. However, just as the Arc de Triomphe or the Louvre often gets second billing, so do some of the lesser-known horse sports in the Bluegrass when, in fact, some of the world's top equestrians live and train alongside some of Kentucky's most beautiful Thoroughbred farms.

Many of these top athletes boast impressive Thoroughbred backgrounds such as dressage aficionado Kathy Priest, jumping's rising star Catie Boone, and Kentucky's eventing hometown hero Dorothy Crowell. All three share a love of and history with the sport of kings. And all three share a sense of excitement about the pending 2010 Alltech World Equestrian Games, which will put Lexington squarely in the center of the sport horse world.



CATIE BOONE
Jumping's Shining Star

KATHY PRIEST
Kentucky's Dressage Aficionado



DOROTHY CROWELL
Eventing's Hometown Hero

KATHY PRIEST

Kentucky's Dressage Aficionado

Priest and her husband, Gary, an equine veterinarian, own Woodspring Farm near Versailles. What is interesting about Woodspring is that two breeds live side by side: Priest's top dressage horses are turned out right next to the farm's elite Thoroughbred athletes.

"I enjoy looking out one of my windows at foals romping in the field with their mothers," said Priest. "I enjoy raising athletes, foaling them out, and getting them ready for the sales, racetrack, and the dressage ring. I love developing these horses."

Priest moved from Ohio to Kentucky 30 years ago and started by teaching riding lessons at Masterson Station Park. Her riding career focused on eventing until she gave birth to the second of her two children, after which she chose to focus on dressage, thinking it would be less time consuming.

Priest's success includes being long-listed (on the list for developing talent) for the U.S. Equestrian Team and having several horses long-listed as well, most of which she trained and competed. She holds bronze, silver, and gold medals from the U.S. Dressage Federation and is hopeful that her current Grand Prix dressage horse, Shostakovich, will finish in the top 12 in the Olympic qualifying finals this year. Priest is adamant that the lessons she learned in the Thoroughbred side of the business have helped make her a successful dressage rider, trainer, and instructor.

"For years I broke the farm's Thoroughbreds for the racetrack, and I find in breaking our young dressage horses I use much the same technique in getting them started under saddle. We are very well set up with a round pen, indoor arena, and outdoor arena, as well as large fields that they can also hack out cross country," she said. "We utilize all these facilities in starting their education under saddle. I feel we are so fortunate in this area to be able to raise our young horses in big, open fields year round."

Priest buys young dressage prospects in Europe, where space and turn-out time are limited and the weather often poor. Ken-

tucky's wealth of land and mild climate, on the other hand, allow horses to spend more time outside. "It makes you appreciate how unique this area of the country is," she noted.

Priest said both the racing and sport horse facets of Woodspring Farm complement each other well and noted that Thor-



LEE P. THOMAS

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oughbreds have had a big influence on many of her successful performance horses. Priest was one of the first in the region to stand a warmblood stallion, Bordeaux, whom she also competed successfully. Because of the accessibility of good Thoroughbred mares, she has raised many crosses that have gone on to be big winners in the dressage ring.

"Years ago the breeds used in dressage were much heavier warmbloods," stated Priest. "Thoroughbreds add the refinement and athleticism, and the warmbloods bring a good temperament. Good Thoroughbred types, not necessarily stakes winners, but the good, solid, athletic types, have done a lot to influence today's dressage horse. A lot of Thoroughbred mares are bred to

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warmbloods in Kentucky because they are so available.”

Having a large farm and caring for a hundred horses a year are bliss for the Priest family, and they can't imagine life any other way. On Woodspring's 365 acres Priest has approximately 15 dressage horses in training for clients, including several of her own as well as some for sale. The Priests also have a few Thoroughbred broodmares of their own and board many other Thoroughbred mares, foals, and yearlings.

“We've got a nice group of clients that we raise Thoroughbreds for, and I like every aspect of farm life,” said Priest. “I've also got a lovely bunch of dressage horses and clients and an amazing (dressage) sponsor in McCauley's (a local feed company). Life is good.”

CATIE BOONE

Jumping's Shining Star

At the tender age of 18, Boone is a force to be reckoned with on the jumping scene. But you would expect that from the granddaughter of Hilary J. Boone Jr., who in 1971 started Wimbledon Farm, a prominent Thoroughbred farm near Lexington, where he and his family raised and cared for Kentucky Derby winner Spectacular Bid and English Derby winner Golden Fleece along with many other Eclipse Award winners and graded stakes performers.

Boone's love of jumping horses may have come from her grandfather, who will be 90 this year and rode as recently as last fall. In the 1980s he owned Grand Prix horses ridden by two-time Olympic silver medalist Anne Kursinski. Hilary Boone also co-owned Eros, the horse that Kursinski won a team silver medal on at the Atlanta Olympics.

Boone's dad, Alex Boone, is also well known in the jumping world. Recently, he won the U.S. Hunter Jumper Association's 2007 Jumper Recognition Award as one of the

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three owners of Up Chiqui, who was named the U.S. Equestrian Federation's 2007 Farnam/Platform USEF Grand Prix National Horse of the Year Champion. Up Chiqui, a talented warmblood who won 11 Grand Prix (the equivalent to winning a grade I stakes race) competitions in 2007, has continued his success in 2008 including being short-listed for the Beijing Olympics.

Although not ready for the Olympic team just yet, Boone has competed in every major competition from Canada to Kentucky to Florida, putting her on the road to success among the



JENNIFER WOODS

Catie Boone bringing home another blue ribbon

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nation's top riders. In 2006 she won individual and team gold medals in the junior show jumper championship of the North American Junior Young Rider Championships (NAJYRC). Upholding the Wimbledon Farm tradition of excellence, she won many other coveted jumping awards that year.

The following year brought similar accolades with championships and high placings at Devon, Spruce Meadows, and elsewhere. In Thoroughbred parlance, these triumphs equate to winning five grade I races, earning second place in two grade I races, winning four grade II races, earning a second and third place in a grade II race, winning two grade III races, and winning an Eclipse Award.

"I've always been fascinated by horses," she said. "I've been riding ever since I can remember, and my parents have been great supporters from day one. They didn't expect me to be a rider just because horses were a big part of their lives; they allowed me to develop a passion for it on my own."

Along the way Boone has had to make her fair share of sacrifices to compete at this level. She has been tutored each of the past four winter semesters so she could compete in Florida. Boone also decided to give up on her passion for tennis and basketball just after ninth grade along with any involvement in after-school activities and organizations such as student council.

But, according to Boone, it has all been worth it. Winning team and individual gold at NAJYRC was her greatest moment to date and a phenomenal feeling. "I was proud of this accomplishment because of the series of competitions that were involved in the championship," she said. "After three days of competition, I knew I had to be doing something right."

As for future goals in the show ring, Boone hopes to represent the United States someday on a Nation's Cup team as well as at an Olympic Games and a World Equestrian Games.

"The good news is they are future goals, meaning hopefully they will be available to pursue at any time," she said. "If I need to be more relaxed about competing for a few years while I attend a university, that is OK because my goals will still remain the same."

Horses will always play a significant role in Boone's life, and she is thrilled with the thought of the World Equestrian Games coming to her hometown in 2010.

"I can't wait to see the amount of people who come out to support the sport," she said. "Riding is not publicized nearly as much as it could be and having an

event like the World Equestrian Games come to Kentucky will hopefully open the eyes of many people who were not aware of the other equestrian disciplines."

DOROTHY CROWELL

Kentucky's Eventing Hometown Hero

For serious eventers Kentucky is the place to be, partly because of the availability of top-notch, off-the-track Thoroughbreds (the most successful breed at the international level of eventing). Crowell was born into Thoroughbreds as the granddaughter of Spendthrift Farm founder Leslie Combs II, a titan in the Thoroughbred industry, and has grown to love them as her breed of choice.

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Dorothy Crowell and Radio Flyer at the Rolex Kentucky Three-Day Event

CHARLES MANN / WWW.ANDRENL

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need on cross-country,” said Crowell. “For this endurance phase what we need underneath us is speed, athleticism, footwork, and last, but not least, we need heart.”

Although Leslie Combs was a pretty serious polo player in the 1920s and '30s, the horse-loving gene skipped over Crowell's parents and, therefore, she waited longer than most to start her enviable eventing career. “After the 1978 World Championship in Lexington, I was hooked,” she said. “I was on the Keeneland Pony Club jump crew. I came home saying ‘that’s what I am going to do,’ and my mother came home saying ‘you are never going to do that.’”

Soon after the World Championship, Crowell leased a polo pony and then bought another horse, Summer Hill, named after the stable on Old Frankfort Pike where she learned to ride.

Gary Priest sold Crowell her next horse, named Waldo Pepper, who had retired from a racing career. Crowell took Waldo Pepper through novice and training level, at which point her parents sent her to Torrance Watkins, a member of the U.S. gold medal-winning three-day event team at the 1984 Olympics. According to Crowell, at this point her eventing career truly began.

Crowell purchased an English Thoroughbred and under Watkins' watchful eye made it to a major event, her first step toward becoming an international event rider.

Since then, Crowell has competed in England's two most prestigious events as well as the Rolex Kentucky Three-Day Event many times when it was a CCI*** and in the inaugural CCI**** in 1998. (A CCI is an international level three-day event, and the stars, ranging from one to four, indicate the level of difficulty.)

That year she and her Kentucky-bred Thoroughbred, Molokai, finished second behind a New Zealand rider, earning Crowell the title of highest-placing American and the USET championship. The pair earned top-five finishes at the world's top-five events and three times placed in the top 10 at Rolex.

The 1998 Rolex, Molokai's last event, holds a special place in Crowell's heart for obvious reasons, not least of which was the fact that the crowd cheered the pair every step of the course. “It did not last long enough for me,” Crowell recalled. “As focused as we were on the course, we could hear it everywhere.”

Crowell also was selected for two Olympic teams and won a silver medal at the 1994 World Equestrian Games at The Hague in the Netherlands. “I’ve been really lucky and had a lot of special moments,” Crowell recalled. “Standing on the podium with a medal around your neck and looking at the grandstands of cheering people and seeing your parents is about as amazing as every child dreams it will be.”

For the past few years Crowell has focused on being a wife, mom, and teacher, with students at every level. She trains and teaches out of her Frankfort home at Sycamore Hill Farm.

Recently, Crowell competed in her first CCI**** since her daughter was born, riding a Kentucky-bred Thoroughbred named Radio Flyer. The pair finished a respectable fifteenth at the Pau CCI**** in France and at this year's Rolex, Dorothy's first time back in 10 years, the pair finished 22 of 43 starters.

Crowell currently competes three horses at the upper levels. One is a warmblood cross that is great on the flat (the dressage phase); the other two are Thoroughbreds. “If you asked me which one I would rather ride on cross-country, it would be the Thoroughbred hands down every time,” said Crowell, tapping into her family's Thoroughbred roots. “An old-fashioned event rider is always going to feel more comfortable on a Thoroughbred. I am a card-carrying member of the club.”

Like most other equine enthusiasts in Kentucky, Crowell is ready for the 2010 Alltech World Equestrian Games.

“I had given up my hopes and dreams of ever representing my country again,” she said. “I was not willing to give up time away from my family and farm, but if they're going to come here to my backyard, I might give it one last shot.” 🐾



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