

News

Todd Minikus. A Horseman And A Gentleman

www.falkirkfarm.com

Showlife

March/April 2008 Vol. 3 No. 2

To be humble to superiors is duty, to equals courtesy, to inferior nobleness." So wrote Benjamin Franklin in Poor Richards Almanac. Grand Prix Jumper rider Todd Minikus displays such humility, not only in his demeanor, but in his philosophy of riding. When this gentleman speaks of his horses or when he is performing in the arena, the joy and passion he shares, not only for but with his horses, is reflected in his eyes and smile.

Minikus, talking from his current winter home in Wellington, Florida, gave SL an introspective into himself and his riding.

This Grand Prix rider gives credit not to his ability to train and ride some of the best Grand Prix jumpers, but to the horses themselves. Focusing on their strengths and talents, he allows each horse to dictate its course of study into the jumper ring and credits each horse with achieving its own success.

"Having horses is a lifestyle. You can't do it part-time, you can't do it most of the time...it's a 24/7 lifestyle." Minikus learned this at a young age while working for Audrey Holt at the tender age of ten. His daily evening responsibility was to fill water buckets for 70 horses seven days a week. He freely admits she wasn't his favorite riding instructor at that point. The young Todd sometimes resented that his responsibilities at the barn intruded into his carefree days as a child.

"She was a great horsewoman...she taught me about dedication and what it takes to become a great rider." Holt expected Minikus to "try hard" and showed him the dedication it takes to achieve dreams. This translated into his adult life; as an instructor to a select group of riders, he tries to instill in them the same values.

His dedication to riding crosses many levels. He took time to train on bulls with Donnie Gay and Terry Holland. He says "this is the one sport where humans haven't taken the advantage...if you make a mistake and get caught, you get hurt". Todd shows Grand Prix Jumpers but if things didn't work out with them, he would take that opportunity to show cutting horses. "It's interesting because the horse has to read and evaluate the cow."

If horses and riding weren't options, Minikus' would be "a race car driver," showing his addiction to that adrenalin rush. He is also an avid golfer and fishing is a favorite hobby. He recently caught what he called a "nice" size black tip shark while saltwater fishing. The shark was about six feet or the spread on some of the oxers at the Grand Prix level.

Currently Minikus has four grand prix horses in the rotation at shows. His ten-year-old Dutch Warmblood, Pavarotti, won the Speed Jumper class at the Pennsylvania National Horse show in 2007. Minikus rides the horses in rotation so each has a turn to showcase its own greatest assets.

"His [Pavarotti's] greatest asset is his 'try'", says Todd about the chestnut gelding. His other mounts include great jumpers past and present. Names like Ultimo van ter Moude, Oh Star, Contigo, Olinda, What Nu, and Gardenio all ring as great athletes allowed to rise to their potential with Minikus in the saddle.

Minikus currently owns ten horses that represent many breeds. Primarily they fall into the category of European horses with Belgian and Dutch breeding. "Budget plays a huge role when getting a horse," he said regarding buying a prospect. Minikus is careful about weighing out the horse's assets and will overlook less desirable qualities if the horse has what he watches for most and considers most important. The Grand Prix Jumper is known for going over big fences and many times asked to clear them at speed. To Minikus, the most important consideration (after the hit to the budget) is "carefulness-it's the most important thing."

Years of experience in the saddle give Minikus the knowledge to prepare a horse for an event. "I feel like I'm 50 plus but act like I'm in my late 20s...As a mature rider, I'm more concerned about the horses' prep work and how they schooled before a class." Spending quality time with and knowing his horses is what he is about and he freely admits that he does stall duty. Getting away from his horses isn't something Minikus likes, so if he's on the road with his horses, he wants to be close by in his home away from home - his bus.

What would his favorite horse say about him? Amanda, his wife, graciously answered for him, "He understands me, he doesn't force me, we discuss the problems". Because of this level of communication, Minikus says, "They try hard for me."

Saddle in hand, and horses in tow, the future looks bright for Minikus. He has been invited to the 2008 Challenge of the Americas riding for Team USA in the jumper division with Candice King. He and his horse of the day will jump a single fence, the height increasing after each jump. After two knockdowns, the combination with the highest fence wins. Last year, the fences went to six feet eleven inches."

Currently his home base is Wellington and the Winter Equestrian Festival. Then it's back onto the show circuits of the northeast in the spring. His show schedule includes many (impressive) shows in which he has previously competed, including the Budweiser American Invitational, the Olympics, and the World Championships. "[I would say to young riders,] you have to make yourself better. Trainers can only give you the informatin to make you a bettr rider. You are responsible for yourself and what you can achieve."