



***KZ Equestrian jumps at the opportunity to represent California at the 2019 Thoroughbred Makeover during the inaugural year of the Team format.***

*by Kaitlyn Zaleski*

It's been nearly two weeks since Retired Racehorse Project released the list of trainers accepted to compete at the 2019 Thoroughbred Makeover, and the excitement of receiving their email inviting me to be amongst the 673 selected trainers still hasn't worn off! As a lifelong equestrian and Thoroughbred enthusiast, I have been a devoted fan of the Thoroughbred Makeover competition since its inception. And this year, for the first time, I won't be watching from the sidelines.

For those not familiar with the Retired Racehorse Project (RRP), the non-profit organization was created in 2010 to facilitate placement of Thoroughbred ex-racehorses in second careers by increasing demand for them and serving the farms, organizations, and individuals that transition them from racing.

At that time, there was a lack of any organization dedicated solely to marketing and promoting Thoroughbred ex-racehorses for useable riding careers. An overabundance of these OTTBs plagued with negative perceptions and historically dwindling demand, were major factors sparking improvements in OTTB advertising and promotional efforts. The Thoroughbred Makeover competition was thus developed to showcase the trainability and talent of OTTBs.

## March 2019 - Thoroughbred Makeover: We're Really Doing This!

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Wednesday, 27 February 2019 04:54

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A major goal of the competition is to support and encourage trainers of all levels and disciplines to get involved and help prepare the horses for new careers beyond the racetrack. The Makeover, now held at the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington, KY each fall is the only national gathering of the organizations, trainers and farms dedicated to serving these Thoroughbred horses when they retire from racing.



Originally from New Jersey, I moved to central California three years ago with my now-fiancé, as he began his career in production animal agriculture. I quickly realized that the hunter/jumper discipline I grew up learning and loving is very uncommon in our region of California. Nonetheless, I have created and am gradually developing a lesson and training program focused on English riding. My fiancé, Luke, also shares a passion for horses. His background and training are almost exclusively in western performance horses (reining, cutting, etc.), which provides an interesting dynamic and unique balance to horse care and training at our barn—certainly some 'differences-of-opinion' on more than one occasion, but he is learning!

In April 2018, we acquired a then 3-year-old OTTB bay filly. Aggie Spirit, aka Hula, was bred, born, and raised by Harris Farms in Coalinga. Although her short, three-start racing career may have been less than impressive, we are excited by her talent, beauty and willingness to learn.

### Team Time

Hula spent the majority of the rest of 2018 in a pasture having plenty of downtime to physically and mentally recuperate from the stress and demands of the racetrack. In mid-December 2018, Luke and I, along with one of my young training students, Megan, began having focused and consistent training sessions with Hula. It was at about that same time when I noticed more buzz on social media posts regarding trainer applications for the Thoroughbred Makeover and learned of the new 'Team' aspect for the 2019 Makeover event. The team format was developed for barns, equestrian teams, and other groups that want to work together in training their OTTB.

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Without letting the daunting challenge of transporting ourselves and a horse all the way to Kentucky in early October order to participate discourage us, Luke, Megan and I decided that it would be foolish not to go for it! We had an eligible horse, three people who were dedicated to training her, and a diverse set of skills and resources. So, we went for it!

The application required references, a veterinary recommendation, riding videos, a personal statement, and explanation of horse and training experience. The next step for most trainers is to acquire and register their Makeover horse, but we are lucky to already have ours.

The Makeover offers 10 disciplines: Show Hunter, Show Jumping, Barrel Racing, Eventing, Dressage, Freestyle, Ranch Work, Competitive Trail, Field Hunter, and Polo. Competitors at the Makeover may compete in either one or two disciplines. Due to Hula's fairly young age and apparent versatility, we are still unsure at this point which disciplines will be most suitable for her. One of our major goals at this early stage is to expose her to as many new places and experiences as possible. The speed and direction of her progress will help us determine the best way to showcase her skills at the Makeover.

I'm so excited to share our journey over the next seven months and hope to raise awareness and increase demand for the incredibly versatile and athletic Thoroughbred breed. I'll be sharing a different piece of our journey each month! For more frequent updates, find us on Facebook (KZ Equestrian) and Instagram (@kzequestrian\_ca).

*For more information about the Makeover, visit [www.tbmakeover.org](http://www.tbmakeover.org).*