



Balance, behavior and no “if-onlys” are among Georgy Maskrey-Segesman’s criteria in sourcing sales and lease prospects for the hunter/jumper market.

by Kim F. Miller

After horse shopping in Europe for 15 years, Georgy Maskrey-Segesman has honed a gift for talent spotting, especially for the equitation and jumper divisions. Based at her family’s Whitethorne Ranch in Ventura County’s Somis, Georgy is known as a top source for lease and sale horses. She enjoyed extra limelight last year as the Whitethorne-sponsored young rider, Emma Pacyna, dominated the equitation division in the West and made her mark nationally on one of those horses, Constantinos.

Germany-based Dutch horseman Tjeert Rijkens is Georgy’s longtime partner. Shopping tours with Tjeert typically include seeing between 10 and 15 horses every day, most of them pre-screened by the Dutchman based on what he likes and what Georgy likes and is looking for on that trip. Sometimes she has a specific rider or division in mind, and often she’s looking for quality prospects with the general U.S. market in mind.

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Equitation is Georgy's specialty and passion, followed by jumpers. If a horse knocks her socks off as a hunter prospect, she'll consider it, too.

Tjeert is a Holsteiner fan with a deep knowledge of bloodlines. While she appreciates his expertise and absorbs what she can, Georgy is not a bloodline expert in an academic sense. However, unknowingly, she often prefers horses from the same lines: Contender, Landgraf and Caretino.

Tjeert has a network of contacts whose farms they first visit. Georgy and Whitethorne's rider Savannah Jenkins typically first evaluate the prospects going under saddle with another rider as their host reviews age, experience, breeding, etc. If the horse meets their initial muster, Savannah will ride it there. The next step is the horse coming to Tjeert's facility to see how it behaves in an unfamiliar setting.



No Second Chances

Initial instincts are influential. "You never get a second chance to make a first impression," Georgy notes. Balance is the first thing she looks for. "They either have it or they don't," she says of how well "the horse can naturally carry himself. You can't teach that." It's evident at the trot and, at the canter, it's critical to a good jump and to being able to find the jumps on a nice stride. Conformationally and in their way of going,

"You don't want them downhill, or excessively uphill either."

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She's also looking for that "nice look" in the horse's eye – a soft expression that indicates relaxation and attentiveness to the rider.

An easy lead change is a make-it or break-it matter, especially in a 6 or 7-year-old. The flying change indicates balance and receptivity to training, Georgy explains. "If someone tried to bring the horse along, but it got flustered at the lead change and never quite got it, that's a bad indicator. Other horses seem to get it the moment they hit the ground." Favoring the latter is a way of "hedging my bets," especially for an equitation horse. Jumpers are a different story. "Touch Of Class cross-fired the entire way around the course," she notes of the Thoroughbred mare Joe Fargis rode to team and individual jumping gold at the 1984 Olympics.

Spookiness is another deal-breaker. "That makes me crazy. With today's rules and regulations, nobody wants to be lunging a horse for an hour to have it rideable." Georgy screens for this trait by placing a jump in an unusual spot in the ring and/or with an unusual element: a cooler over the rail or an unfamiliar box underneath it.

"I don't mind if they take a peek, but if they are repeatedly scared or skittish, no thank you." The prospect's second or third passes are critical. "If they get a little frozen or take a stutter step the first time, but are more bold the second or third time, I'm OK. Of course, my happy place is the horse that canters down brave as a bull and doesn't care what you put up."

A "heartless" horse is crossed off the list. "He can't give up if the distance is a little long." Good, natural jumping form is critical. "They have to jump well in front: not dangling a leg or dropping a shoulder."

Stride length needs to be big enough for whatever division Georgy has in mind for the horse, though if that comes with a difficult-to-sit trot, she'll think twice. Georgy's expertise is equitation horses and, especially for them, "the sitting trot has to be comfortable." If the horse is an "unbelievable mover" she might compromise on that point.

If the horse passes the under-saddle test, Georgy wants to see it being handled in the cross-tie and observe it in the stall for general behavior. "Nobody wants a barracuda," she says. "Years ago, I got one that was a cribber because I hadn't paid careful attention to him in the barn."

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Prospects for sale or lease are scrutinized with different criteria, Georgy notes. “It might sound strange, but for me, the lease horse is held to the higher standard because he has the very specific job of teaching a rider and he’s usually going to change programs consistently – usually every year. He has to want to take a rider by the hand and educate them.”

Not all horses are suited for that. She cites Emma Pacyna’s star equitation partner, Constantinos, as an example: “My inclination is that he would get flustered if he was teaching a 3’ kid how to do the Big Eq division. His job is to be an Indoors horse with someone that already rides well.”

Veterinary exam results are evaluated a little differently for lease or sale horses, too. Although it’s rare for any horse to have perfectly clean x-rays, the sale horse needs the best report possible. With a lease prospect, Georgy looks at the x-rays in the context of the horse’s age and how it moves. “If there’s a change on the x-ray, but the horse is 11 and living with it, I’m OK with that. If he’s 5 and his feet are a little upright, but he’s sound and going, I’m OK with that.”



No “If Only...”

If these basic criteria aren’t solid, Georgy takes a pass. “Selecting a horse is like dating,” she explains. “If you have to say, ‘If only...’ I think you are probably never going to be able to fix it.” There are exceptions to every rule, but she says, “It’s better to go with very specific criteria, based on what I can live with, and stick to it.”

Georgy foresees that her long-standing partnership with Tjeert will continue to source the bulk of Whitethorne’s lease and sale prospects, but she’s also interested in buying American-bred

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horses. She describes three programs, Kimberlee Farms, Three Wishes Farm and Anke Magnussen's program, as examples of excellent domestic sporthorse producers. The problem is the cost of developing them in the States.

The first obstacle is open land for youngsters to grow up naturally in large pastures. The second is the expense of the early years of show mileage needed to make them ready for buyers who mostly want a horse they can start competing with right away.

Blenheim EquiSports and other show organizers who offer waived or discounted entry and stall fees for young horses are a big help, she emphasizes. Yet the cost of getting a young horse ready for sale is still prohibitively high.

In sponsoring Emma Pacyna and hosting the Whitethorne American Tradition of Excellence Equitation Challenges, Georgy has put her money where her concerns are in attempting to improve aspects of the hunter/jumper sport. Tackling young horse development costs is on her radar screen in the future.

Staging schooling shows at her facility is a possibility. The key, she states, is developing a way to track results at such unrecognized events, so that breeders have show records to include in the horse's marketing package. While only in the idea stage now, such an effort would fit with one of Georgy's priorities. "I feel really strongly that, if we want to participate in the sport, we have to give back to it and do whatever we can to try to keep it going."

The Gallop welcomes news, tips and photos. Contact Kim F. Miller at kimfmiller1@mac.com.