

Mischief Farm assistant trainer scores another Horsemanship Quiz victory.

by Kim F. Miller

Hunter/jumper trainer Elizabeth Evans has packed a lot of learning into her lifetime and, at 22, she's only just getting started. The assistant trainer, to her mother, Susan Evans, at Mischief Farm in Moorpark, Elizabeth was Zone 10 winner of the USHJA Horsemanship Quiz Challenge Stable Challenge for trainers this summer.



The honor resulted from having students earn the highest collective score on the program's practice quiz. It's Elizabeth's third consecutive win of this title and it continues her legacy with the HQC. As a junior rider, she helped the Zone 10 team earn silver in the Quiz's inaugural year, 2012, and that same year she became an ambassador for it. In 2014, Elizabeth was a lecturer at the Quiz's Nationals Finals and helped her student, Anastasia Park von Simun, contribute to team bronze.

"I love the Horsemanship Quiz Challenge," Elizabeth raves of the increasingly popular program presented by The Plaid Horse. It encourages and celebrates knowledge and its application in everyday horse care and effective riding, she explains. And it's a perfect fit for the modus operandi at Mischief Farm.

"Every kid is going to learn everything about everything," says Elizabeth. Tacking up their own horse for every lesson is just the beginning. Feed, nutrition, anatomy, saddle fit and course design are a few of the topics covered in daily instruction at Mischief Farm and the Quiz' study

guide is a great way to supplement that.

In addition to a thorough horsemanship education, European-style show jumping is the training focus at Mischief Farm. Per Elizabeth, that means emphasizing dressage as critical to horse and rider's flatwork foundation and stressing function over form. The horsemanship intensive approach originated with Susan, an American Riding Instructor Association-certified instructor, and the shift toward show jumping crystallized when Elizabeth had the chance to work with Melanie Smith Taylor in the USHJA's Emerging Athletes Program's first year in 2009.



"She is one of my absolute favorites and she finalized a lot of things for us as far as how we really wanted to approach jumping," Elizabeth says of working with the 1984 Olympic gold medalist and 1982 World Cup Finals winner. "She is jumper-centric and she's more interested in you being a functional rider than a 'pretty' rider."

At the time of her first EAP clinic, Elizabeth was having a difficult time riding a difficult horse. "I was holding on and steering," she laughs. Going back to basics, including the idea that "if you can't ride poles on the ground, you can't do jumps," were among the concepts Melanie reinforced for Elizabeth.

Olympic course designer Linda Allen is another horsewoman Elizabeth has drawn core insights from. Teaching the horse to do its job and letting him do it, and exercises that help improve a horse's jumping form, are among those. Jeff Cook, Will Simpson, Liz Denny and Anne Kursinski are others who've helped shape Elizabeth's approach to riding, training and coaching.

The jumper emphasis has been a good fit for the horses that tend to come Elizabeth's way. It's geared toward getting the best out of any horse and enables those who might be "misfits" in the hunter and equitation rings to excel in their own arenas.

With an individualized approach to each horse and student, Mischief Farm does teach and train for the hunter and equitation division when it's appropriate. But most students are pleased to start in the lower jumper divisions well served by regional show association competitions,

including those on the Tri-Valley Horse Show Association circuit. When and if a student wants to pursue the higher level hunter and equitation tracks, Elizabeth and Susan are happy to help them find the right trainer to move on to.



“We attract a lot of students who have outgrown the hunter and equitation divisions,” Elizabeth explains. Whatever their level of experience, students benefit from small, often private, lessons in which “we break down your riding then build them back up from the basics.” It’s not the quickest route to show ring success, Elizabeth notes, but it’s right one. “If you are going to learn, you might as well do it correctly.”

Mischief Farm relocated to the Southern California Riding Club in Moorpark in July and Elizabeth and Susan are thrilled with their new digs. The facility is beautifully maintained, Elizabeth says, and they have their own arena for lessons and training, plus access to the property’s many amenities.

Along with building up the business, Elizabeth is excited about continued progress with her own two jumpers. Sotogrande is “16 going on 2,” she laughs. The 17.1 hand Dutch Warmblood came to her as a sales horse and, with Krack C in his bloodline, was considered a dressage candidate. “Nobody had bothered to jump him,” she says. It turns out he could handle 4’ pretty easily, so she decided to keep him. Her other mount is Clarkus Maximus, another 17.1 hander. The Dutch Gelderlander gelding came Elizabeth’s way a few years ago with allergies and a limb length disparity. Those challenges have made his progress a little slow, but Elizabeth is proud of their increasing success at the 1.1 meter division.

Her ultimate goal is the World Equestrian Games and the Olympics and she’s confident these two will be good partners for her current step in that quest.

In addition to riding and teaching, Elizabeth has made giving back to the industry a big priority. Volunteer work is often a role taken on by veterans in the sport, but she jumped right in at the

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Wednesday, 02 September 2015 00:10

beginning of her professional career.

Elizabeth is a board member for the Tri-Valley Horse Show Association, as well as its website designer and webmaster. And she's the team representative for the Sierra Canyon High School Interscholastic Equestrian League team, a team she founded when she was a freshman at the school.

Circling back to her own passion for education, Elizabeth would love to see more opportunities for young riders to get first hand experience with the Melanie Smith-Taylors of the world. "I would love to see more opportunities to learn from people like that without it costing an arm, a leg and a kidney." Given the young trainer's pro-active approach to everything else, that may get added to her own to-do list soon.