

Unlikely dressage star helps event trainer earn USDF medal.

by Kim F. Miller

Nathan is not your standard model dressage star. Affectionately referred to as “Eeyore,” he has floppy ears and a demeanor that lacks confidence, just like the Winnie the Pooh character. The Thoroughbred was bred to race but never did and he tried eventing through Training Level, but “wasn’t too fond of picking up his toes,” says trainer Susan Friend LeTourneur. And, at 19, he’s no spring chicken.



But as a lesson mount and a lower level dressage horse, Nathan lives up to his registered name: Can’t Touch This, after MC Hammer’s bravado rap hit.

“He was a client’s horse and I bought him for .25 cents 10 years ago,” explains Susan, who owns and operates Goldspirit Farm boarding and training business in Lake View Terrace’s Kagel Canyon.

Annoyed by the notion that “event riders don’t know how to do dressage,” Susan decided to go after the United States Dressage Federation medals. She gave herself the further challenge of earning at least one on Nathan.

Begun in 2010, the quest was interrupted regularly by the realities of running a busy program, which includes a Pony Club Riding Center, yet Susan did achieve her goal. A bronze medal requires two scores of at least 60% at each of three levels: First, Second and Third. She and Nathan earned the last score needed for a bronze medal this summer at the Mission Pacific

Equestrian Centre in Somis.



“He’s a tough horse,” Susan notes. ‘He’s totally tense and he did not like to come up through his back at first. But he’s been a very good boy and we may push on and try to earn the first half of the silver medal.”

At the moment, Goldspirit’s clientele does not include riders competing in open dressage shows, so Susan’s medal journey was an unusual solo adventure.

“We are usually doing horse trials and jumper shows, so it was just me and my ‘pony’ going to the dressage shows. I love all my students, but it was nice to have that self-absorbed, selfish time when you can totally focus on you.” She appreciated being granted early morning ride times so she could get back to her own stable in time to teach or accompany students to events.

Dressage, of course, is an important component of eventing training and competition and it has always been a staple of the Goldspirit program. One of the discipline’s many benefits is its ability to help horses stay sound. “Dressage is the key to everything,” Susan asserts. “We see hunters retiring at 14 or 16, but dressage and event horses last so much longer and I think it’s because the work they do coming over their backs saves their legs.

“With humans, if we need to lift something heavy, we bend our knees to help save our backs,” she continues. “With horses, it’s the opposite. If they are trained properly, they can use their backs to save their legs. The more you can get them up and over through the back, it creates an effect like a suspension bridge, putting less compression and less weight on their legs.”

Susan acknowledges that others might have a different opinion on the subject, but she’s seen the theory prove true repeatedly in many years as a professional. Going strong at 19 and a

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favorite among students interested in dressage, Nathan is one of the youngest horses in her lesson string.

Whether or not Susan moves Nathan onto a silver medal journey, their quest has already created one terrific lesson horse and one well-deserved medal.