

December 2017 - Parade of Champions

Written by CRM

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Every year we ask questions of a cross-section of stars from various show circuits throughout the year. From the 24 year old winner of the NorCal Senior Medal Finals, Kaitlin Perry, to the 12 year old Greater San Diego Hunter/Jumper Association year-end champ in two divisions, Noah Nelson, these young equestrians reflect a hard work ethic and love of the horse that bodes well for the future.

We asked:

1. The 3 2017 competitive finishes of which you are most proud.
 2. Top horsemanship lessons and/or progress you've made this year.
 3. The most enjoyable non-competitive moment with your horse.
 4. Does your horse have any funny quirks? If so, what are they?
 5. What rider do you most admire and why?
 6. Do you have a favorite horsemanship or horse-related book, movie, video, YouTube channel, website, etc.? If so, what?
 7. What is your biggest riding goal for 2018?
 8. Are there any major changes you would like to see in our sport?
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Kaitlin Perry

This 24 year old amateur trains with Kelly Van Vleck in the Sacramento area's Rancho Murieta. Her horse is the 7 year old Figaro, aka "Figg."

1. Winning the NorCal Senior Medal Finals; Second place in the first round of the CPHA Foundation 22/over finals; High point rider in the 22/over age group for the CPHA Foundation Equitation Class in the qualifying year.
2. Almost too many to count! Figg and I had many ups and downs this year, but I truly believe he has started coming into his own this past year. I've thoroughly enjoyed watching him figure it all out – from learning what work-offs are, how much he loves his turnouts and his obsession with dogs, it has been a blast. I have never worked with a young horse in this capacity, so I feel the biggest horsemanship lesson I've learned this year has been how to help him learn without getting in the way. All of our progress is a direct result of the patience, work and time Kelly, Chelsea and the entire Van Vleck team have put into us.
3. Every moment I get to spend with him! He has a huge personality and knows how special he is, so he definitely plays it up. Specifically, he loves to pose for photos – I really think he missed his calling as a model!
4. He's super smart and will do anything for attention. The main thing he does – and has done since he was imported – is play with his tongue a lot (photo attached for reference!) He does it in the cross ties, his stall, grazing, etc. He also plays it up when he thinks people are watching. He's a huge ham.
5. Mandy Porter. She grew up competing in Northern California, is an insanely talented rider, is kind and knowledgeable and is a phenomenal horseman. I'm also still obsessed with her retired mare, Summer.



6. Tonya Johnston's book, *Inside Your Ride: Mental Skills for Being Happy and Successful with Your Horse*. I really struggled with nerves throughout my junior career and into college when I rode on Texas Christian University's NCEA equestrian team. I started working with Tonya my freshman year, and she completely transformed my mindset when on a horse. I still struggle with nerves, but with Tonya's help, I've learned to use that energy in a better way by focusing on my horse and how much I want him to do well and enjoy the moment.
 7. Since aging out of the junior division, I haven't really set competitive goals for myself. I go into every class, show and lesson with the same mindset: improve my riding to help Figg be the best possible version of himself. However, taking into account the way he's been going and how much he has matured this year, I'd love to prepare him for next year's WCE finals.
 8. To continue the emphasis on the hardest working riders in our sport. We've seen it recently with blog posts calling for the return of the barn rat or articles highlighting the juniors that worked their way to Maclay finals. I'd love to continue seeing stories of the juniors, amateurs and professionals that focus on their horses, live in the moment and work harder than anyone to accomplish their goals.
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