



Fifteen-year-old embodies the term “student of the sport.”

by Kim F. Miller

Horseracing was Trent McGee’s first addiction. At 6, his dad took him to the Santa Anita Racetrack where, “I fell in love with the horses,” the 15-year-old recounts. “They were so amazing and I immediately wanted to do that.” Weekend trips back to the track were a frequent family outing after that.

For his seventh birthday, Jason and Dolores McGee arranged riding lessons for their son. They started at the Traditional Equitation School at the Los Angeles Equestrian Center, where instructor Caitlin Steimle suggested Trent check out a Grand Prix competition at the facility to “see if you like it.”

Trent liked it. A lot.

“My first memory of the sport was watching Richard Spooner and Cristallo and thinking, ‘Who is

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that?’ and ‘What is he doing?’ And I loved it.” At 9, Trent knew exactly what he wanted to be when he grew up: a Grand Prix rider. He’s been laser-focused ever since, currently tackling the 1.2M jumpers with his partner in progress: the coming-7 year old Dutch Warmblood, Garfield.



Back at that pivotal Grand Prix, Richard Spooner wasn’t the winner in a field that included Rich Fellers, Susie Hutchison and the eventual victor, Ashlee Bond. But he did win a lifelong fan. Posters of Richard and his first star horse, Robinson, line Trent’s room and the “master of faster” has been an idol ever since. Right up there with Zenyatta and the mare’s jockey Mike Smith.

So it was pretty cool to ride with Richard in the USHJA Emerging Jumper Athlete Gold Star Clinic at HITS Coachella in January. Trent qualified for a spot in the four-day clinic by medaling in the Zone 10 Jumper Championships held in November. Driven by his own curiosity and passion for horsemanship, he is a true student of the sport. He’s an avid reader, watcher of show jumping videos and live competitions and has already ridden in more clinics than many will in their lifetime.

He signed up for his first George Morris clinic at the minimum age of 12, and has ridden in one more and audited another. At the suggestion of his trainer Scott Lico, Trent prepped for the first by reading horsemanship books by Morris and by Morris’ mentor, Gordon Wright. Scott had ridden with Morris many times and trained as a junior with Morris protégé Karen Healey, so he knew the system wouldn’t be foreign to his young student.

“We always say that Scott is a little George Morris, so doing the clinic with him was hearing all the things that Scott says and then adding more,” Trent explains. Of the many great examples Scott sets for his students, Trent loves the fact that his trainer goes into note-taking student mode at all of the clinics Trent has ridden in. That included the USHJA’s Emerging Athlete

Program last summer, in which Trent rode with 1984 gold medalist Joe Fargis.

He's learning from everybody – often with differing styles and approaches. George Morris says the foot should touch the outside branch of the stirrup; Joe Fargis says inside branch. George Morris advocates the American forward riding system, while Richard Spooner encouraged riders to sit into the tack more.

“I appreciate the differences and the similarities,” says Trent, adding that there were plenty of the latter. “They all have the common trait of caring for the horse first. And all taught not to worry about the distance, to focus on rhythm and pace instead and to adapt what you are doing to each horse.” The different approaches, he adds, are all worth testing out and incorporating into his tool kit as a developing horseman.

Green On Green

Pairing a young horse and a young rider is often a bad idea, but it's worked well for Trent and Garfield. On a shopping trip in early 2016, Trent recalls trying over 100 horses. A jumper with extensive, high-level mileage was not an option budget-wise. So they focused on young horses, an area in which Scott has developed a good track record. At VDL Stud in the Netherlands, the then 4 year old chestnut Garfield stood out to then 13 year old Trent and his trainer.

“We were looking for a horse that I could grow with and who had the talent to do the big stuff,” Trent explains. “When we tried Garfield, he jumped phenomenal but was rough around the edges. We tried him over two days, and the improvement in what he did with what we were trying to teach him between the first and second day was so vast. That drove it home to us that this was a horse we needed. I could tell he was a fighter and that he wanted to please me.” Along with being careful, brave and quick over the ground, that desire to please is his greatest quality, Trent asserts.

The 1.3M division by mid-year is a goal, along with dipping their toe into the 1.4M by year's end. That's assuming that each step up is “a good experience for Garfield,” Trent explains. He'll be looking for the 16 hand gelding to “jump extra high” at each new fence height, “then settle into it.” That will indicate that he's comfortable with the next level of difficulty. And, Trent, too. “The plan was that we would progress together and take it slow.”

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If all goes well, qualifying for the Zone 10 North American Junior/Young Riders Championship team is the main target for 2019.

“Since he first started riding with me, at 11, he told me he wanted to be a Grand Prix rider,” recounts Scott. After having to evacuate Middle Ranch in Lake View Terrace in December’s Creek fire, Scott Lico Stables went first to LAEC. They are now settling into a new permanent home at Hacienda Del Valle, known as “North Middle Ranch” before being sold to its current owners.

Scott has a small clientele of juniors and amateurs. Like Trent, most have only one horse and all buy into Scott’s emphasis on “doing a lot of homework” and showing typically just 10 to 12 times a year. It’s partly to keep costs within reason, and, more importantly, it allows for “slow work that prepares us to have good results at the shows,” the trainer explains. Clinics with other trainers are another emphasis with Scott, sometimes instead of competing.



Super Hard Worker

Trent’s passion for the sport is paired with “being a naturally strong, brave, bold type of rider,” Scott reports. “He has the blood and guts to take one less stride, take that turn, to go for the win. When he first came to me, it was a matter of controlling the beast. He was riding a bit faster than he was ready to.”

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Trent credits much of his ascent to Scott and the trainer describes Trent as “a super kid and super hard worker and he loves the sport. I’m proud of how far he’s come and I think he can go far.”

Early on, Trent and his family made special school arrangements to accommodate his passion. He attends Cal Lutheran High School in Riverside County’s Wildomar, where he lives with relatives and attends class only on Monday and Tuesday. The rest of the week, he lives at home, continues classwork online and spends every possible second at the stable. Wednesdays through Sundays, “I wake up, do homework and go right to the barn, where I stay until 5 or 6 at night. I do whatever they need me to do. Cleaning the tack room, grooming horses, painting something if that’s needed.” He welcomes every chance to ride and is Scott’s go-to guy whenever a barnmate can’t come out. He’s also a budding catch rider on the A-circuit.

Gratitude underscores every aspect of Trent’s tale of his show jumping adventure so far. Heaps of it go to the family members, teachers and coaches who make his unusual schedule, impressive education and competitive accomplishments possible.

Supporting Trent is a family affair for the McGees. It’s not unusual to see an entourage of 20 out to cheer him on at competitions or watch him in clinics. Younger brother Colton is actually allergic to most animals but he shares Trent’s enthusiasm for show jumping as a fan. The World Cup Finals in Las Vegas and the Thermal AIG Million are a few of the big classes they’ve enjoyed together as spectators. “He gets excited about it and for me, too. He understands the sport.”

If all goes well, he’ll have a big brother to root for in those competitions in the future.

Trent’s Favorite Textbooks

- Hunter Seat Equitation, by George Morris
- Reflections on Riding & Jumping, by William Steinkraus

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- The American Jumping Style, by George Morris
- Learning to Ride Hunt & Show, by Gordon Wright
- Riding & Jumping Clinic, by Anne Kursinski
- The de Nemethy Method: Classic Showjumping, by Bertalan de Nemethy