

Interview With Equitation Star Sydney Hutchins.

Written by Emily Halbreich
Friday, 28 November 2014 00:00



Sixteen-year-old Sydney Hutchins is on a roll. She recently won the ASPCA Maclay Regionals West, the Taylor Harris Insurance Services (THIS) National Children's Medal Finals and The Platinum Performance/USEF Show Jumping Talent Search West.

As we went to press, Sydney was ranked 14th on the Bigeq.com equitation index and was preparing for the Maclay Finals at the National Horse Show set to conclude November 2 at the Kentucky Horse Park. Roving reporter Emily Halbreich welcomed the chance to sit down with this accomplished rising star.

Q. Where are you from originally?

A. Westlake Village.

Q. When did you start riding?

A. When I was 5 years old.

Q. What was your first barn?

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A. Elvenstar (in Moorpark), and I've been with them ever since.

Q. When did you fall in love with riding?

A. It was by coincidence that I started riding. My parents knew I was really serious about it when I broke my arm a couple of times and I still wanted to go back and do it again. I've always loved being around horses. It's a great learning experience not only with riding, but with real life.



Q. How old were you when you did your first show?

A. My first show I was 6. It was a Tri-Valley show at a local showgrounds down the street from us.

Q. What was your first pony's name?

A. I had a couple ponies, my first was Amos Almost Famous.

Q. What horses do you have now?

A. Gaudi, Sorcerer and Zorlando. They are all Dutch Warmbloods.

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Q. Which is your favorite?

A. I can't say I have a favorite. I have favorite things about them but there's not one I like the best. Zorlando, my jumper, is the most fun to ride. Jumpers are my favorite thing to do. Sorcerer, whose barn name is George, is the nicest one. He's one of my best friends. Gaudi is my favorite to show, he knows his job at the shows.

Q. Is it hard to balance riding with school?

A. I'm in 11th grade, so it is very difficult but it is just something you have to get used to and I have to manage my time well.

Q. What does a typical day look like for you?

A. I go to school, right after school I immediately come home, change clothes, go to the barn and I usually ride two or three horses. I have two lessons then I come home, do homework and sleep and then it starts all over again.

Q. Who are your trainers?

A. Jim Hagman and Katie Gardner. Ever since I was a little girl I've always looked up to Katie. I was always in the ring down below and I'd watch her ride up in the main arena and I'd always wish I could be there one day and now here I am and she's my trainer.

Jim is incredible. He's such an amazing teacher. He teaches not just about horses, he's a great horseman, he teaches life lessons to. Every Tuesday lesson he calls us all in and he has a theme for the week. The theme can be kindness or treating others right. He draws his teaching from his own experiences.

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Q. What were your biggest victories?

A. My biggest victories were the USEF Talent Search a couple weeks ago, Maclay Regionals and the Taylor Harris Children's Medal.

Q. How did you feel when you won them?

A. At the Maclay Regionals, I felt pretty confident going in because I know it's not one I need to win necessarily, I just need to go in and have a smooth round and make it on to the next step, which is Kentucky. But the fact that it was in front of George Morris was a little nerve racking. It felt amazing that he was there and he watched me and noticed me and how I am as a rider.

For the Taylor Harris medal, that was incredible. It was my first time doing equitation week back East and that was crazy. I only rode the horse I was riding for a couple weeks beforehand and it gave me a good boost of confidence for future shows.

For the USEF Talent Search last year, we went into the stadium phase and we struggled a little bit. The horse that I was riding, George, is one I struggle with sometimes. He's not my main show horse, he's a little rusty when it comes to the show ring and I don't have as much confidence as I usually do riding him. My main goal was to be smooth and have a nice round. It all worked out and it was incredible. He was awarded best horse, which made me so proud of him.

Q. Which competitions are you looking forward to most?

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A. I'm looking forward to Washington. It was so much fun last year and it's so different because the stalls are right on the street and everything's so close. I think it's one of my favorites. Also, I always look forward to the back East finals.

Q. How do you get ready for a show?

A. I usually don't think about it too much because, if I have to think about all of the things I have to do, it stresses me out. I just wake up, ride my horses and make sure they're all prepared. I separate myself from people, I don't want to talk too much, I just want to focus on what I have to do and then go do it."

Q. What are your plans for the future?

A. I'm probably going to start moving into the jumpers more. I'm still going to finish out my junior years doing the back East finals, and I think next year we are going to start doing the Junior Jumpers and see how that turns out, and obviously keep with the equitation for the next couple of years. I'm also going to go to college. My goal is to be on a team there.

Q. What is your favorite thing about riding?

A. Being with the horses, they teach you a lot even though you can't speak to them. It's like learning from a child, they don't have as much experience as you, but you can still learn a lot from them. They teach you how to take care of things and you always have to make sure that they're okay.

Q. What is the most valuable lesson you have learned?

A. Being confident in what you do, you don't worry about others and what they think about you,

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you just go in and be yourself and ride the way know you can. For real life too, you don't have to worry about what others think, you just have to be who you are, and accomplish what you need to and not worry about anything else.

Q. What is your biggest pet peeve?

A. Not treating the horses well. I hate when riders come out of the arena and they're like, "Well, my horse did this..." No, you made the mistake and you should own up to it.

Q. How do your parents feel about horses?

A. Before I started riding they had no idea about horses, they didn't know it was a sport, they didn't know it was something people did. Now that we've been doing it for so long they get the hang of it and they're very supportive of me and they know it's something I really love and care about so they support me through it.

Q. Who do you look up to?

A. My trainers Jim and Katie. They're so different in the way they do things. I can learn different things from them and they each have a different point of view to help me understand.

Q. If you could take a lesson from one person who would it be?

A. George Morris. I have had lessons with him before, but there's endless things you can learn from him.

Q. Is there anything else you want to add?

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A. Thank you to my parents and trainers for supporting me and giving me the opportunity to do all that I do. I'm very fortunate to get to go back East and have all of these amazing horses and they donate so much of their time to me.

Reporter Emily Halbreich is a lifelong eventing rider who is currently transitioning to jumpers. She lives in the Los Angeles area's Pacific Palisades and rides nearby. She can be reached at emilyhalbreich@yahoo.com.