



Riders Need To Make Their Own Opportunities

Our columnist wants riders to take the time to put in the work—not just hope a big sponsor comes along to save the day.

Charlotte Bredahl-Baker

A FEW WEEKS AGO I was attending the High Performance Dressage Committee meeting at the U.S. Equestrian Federation convention in Lexington, Ky. While at the meeting, it struck me that I had known most of the people on the committee for at least 10 years and some closer to 20 years.

Later that evening at the USEF welcome dinner, I was sitting with Anne Gribbons (Technical Advisor) and Gil Merrick (former Director of Dressage), and again it struck me how many years I had known most of the people in the room.

We started talking about it, and in one way it's nice because we've all become like family (sometimes a bit dysfunctional). On the other hand, it was disturbing because we don't have a lot of new blood coming up. We spent most of the evening discussing why that is. If we look at the top 12 Grand Prix riders in

the country, most of them have been around for a long time with only a couple of newcomers. Obviously experience counts for a lot in dressage, but I think the main reason we don't see a lot of newcomers becoming really successful is a change in work ethic and a lack of patience and persistence on the part of many of the younger riders.

► Paying Your Dues

Over the past 10 years I've had young riders come up to me and ask me how I got sponsors. My answer was that I never had a sponsor, but I had partnerships. I think we have a lot of very talented young riders, but I get the feeling they think they only have a chance to make it if they have a sponsor buy them a great horse. I never believed that was true. I believe if you work very hard, have high integrity and appreciate your opportuni-

ties without feeling entitled you will get your chance.

Most of our very successful trainers/riders were in some sort of apprenticeship for a long time before going off on their own. They gained a lot of experience riding many different horses and had a mentor to guide them. They also didn't have the pressure of owning their own business—a situation many of today's high performance riders find themselves in.

When we look at the U.S. dressage team from the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games, for some it may seem like many of them are newcomers, but this is not true. They've paid their dues for a long time.

In 1992 when I was on the Olympic Team in Barcelona (on a \$10,000 horse that I trained), Katherine Bateson-Chandler was working as a groom for Robert Dover, who was also on the team. She worked her way up to assistant, and for the past 18 years she has been paying her dues with blood, sweat and tears. She is one of the nicest people you will ever meet (that helps in getting a sponsor). She does have a great sponsor now in Jane Forbes Clark, but she has truly earned it.

Jane Forbes Clark was Robert Dover's former sponsor, and I'm sure she was impressed with Katherine's ability as well as her work ethic, commitment and love for the horses.

I met Tina Konyot when I was training in Germany at Herbert Rehbein's in 1991 and 1992. She spent years in Germany learning from this master and has spent the past 19 years working very hard training one horse after the other. She's been close to making the team

Katherine Bateson-Chandler spent 18 years paying her dues and impressing with her work ethic and commitment before riding at the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games.



(Sara Lieser Photo)



with several other horses without having a sponsor. Tina is a fifth generation animal trainer, and her dad laid the foundation of true horsemanship. Tina started out training very difficult horses that no one else could handle and eventually turned them around and sold them for a profit. Tina has trained and owns her WEG horse Calecto V.

Find yourself a highly respected mentor/trainer and become a working student/assistant.

Todd Flettrich won gold at the 1991 North American Young Riders Championships on a horse owned by his trainer, Jessica Ranshausen. He was also a working student for several other trainers before becoming a professional. His WEG horse Otto is owned by Margaret Duprey.

Steffen Peters has successfully brought horse after horse to the Grand Prix level and, even though he has a wonderful sponsor in Akiko Yamazaki, he is a very hard worker and constantly gives back to the sport. Before he moved to the United States, he went through the Bereiter education in Germany. Courtney King-Dye worked with and for Lendon Gray for many years before making the Olympic Team in Hong Kong.

Another example of great work ethic, commitment and drive is Anne Gribbons. She's trained many horses to Grand Prix from scratch, as well as working her way up the ladder to become an FEI O-level judge, which is no easy feat. She is now a very successful Technical Advisor for the U.S. team. All of these examples of success in their field enjoy the everyday process of training, not just the reward of receiving ribbons.

► Give In Order To Receive

As for myself, I still ride four to five horses a day and get on my first horse every morning at 7:30 a.m. unless I am off judging or giving a clinic somewhere. I feel so incredibly lucky to be able to make a living at what I love.

My biggest dilemma is that I love all three aspects (riding, judging and teaching), and sometimes I have trouble

deciding between them. What a great dilemma to have.

A few weeks ago I got two new horses from Canada in training. One horse (Aria) had been trained to Intermediaire I and knew changes down to two-tempis. The owner wanted me to work on all the Grand Prix movements including the one-tempis. On Valentines Day Aria did her first set of 15 ones, and I got it videotaped. I sent an email to the owners wishing them a Happy Valentines Day and attached a clip of their horse doing the one-tempis. It made the owners very happy, but it was also very fun and gratifying for me. Those types of things keep me going, not the ribbons.

I find today the young riders are too much in a hurry to be professionals without having gained the experience necessary to back them up. In recent years I've seen many very talented young riders come up the ranks and then, like shooting stars, disappear off the horizon, never to be seen again.

If I were to give advice to a young person coming up the ranks today, I would say find yourself a highly respected mentor/trainer and become a working student/assistant. Learn all you can from this trainer and his horses. I know it's not always easy to find a trainer willing to take on a working student, but there are other ways to learn from them. Perhaps you can come and watch them ride on a regular basis and help out a bit. If you show you are really committed to learning, most good trainers will help out.

I would encourage other well-established trainers to mentor upcoming talented trainers who are committed to becoming true professionals. If you are not a big name you might have to ride a horse for no compensation in order to receive a long-term commitment from an owner. If the horse is special, it's worth it. You have to be willing to give

in order to receive. You also have to be creative to work out partnerships that will benefit all parties. Breeders are sometimes open to partnerships. They have nice young horses but may not want to put a lot of money into training. You can offer free training in exchange for getting a percentage of sale. If the partnership works out well, perhaps the breeder will let you keep one special horse long term.

The only way to truly become a great trainer is to train horse after horse. There are no shortcuts. Working with and training multiple numbers of different horses is the only way that you gain the experience needed. Every horse will present a new challenge, and you will gain experience from which to build a foundation of knowledge. I believe horses will teach you more than any one person can—if you listen. If you are a working student, start to develop your own business on the side, but don't be in a rush. If you take your time, you will be better prepared to achieve that high level of competence that will ultimately bring you a long and lasting career. USEF dressage needs you.

There are no shortcuts.

We do have some very talented trainers with international team potential who have already proven they can bring more than one horse successfully up the levels. In several cases they own very gifted horses they have trained themselves. They are in the dilemma of having a great horse but not the money to campaign them at the highest level. Those trainers have truly paid their dues and deserve all the help we can give them. If we don't, chances are they will sell these great horses and we will lose potential team horses. 🐾

In 1992 Charlotte Bredahl-Baker was part of the U.S. bronze-medal Olympic team in Barcelona with Monsieur. She's represented the United States in many international dressage competitions and spent three summers training and competing in Europe. Charlotte is a U.S. Equestrian Federation "S" and Fédération Equestre Internationale "C" rated judge. She was a selector for the 2008 Olympic Games in Hong Kong and the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games. In 2009 and 2010 she was the featured clinician for the U.S. Dressage Federation Adult clinic series in all nine regions. She is also on the High Performance Committee for USEF. This is her first Between Rounds column.



(David Steekin Photo)