



Hunter/Equitation Horse Of The Year: Harmony

by Mollie Bailey

This mare may just be the horse of a lifetime for junior rider Lucy Davis and trainer Archie Cox.

When trainer Archie Cox emphatically describes a horse as “the best horse I’ve ever ridden,” the “horse of a lifetime,” and “a dream come true” you know that he’s referring to a spectacular animal. After all, Cox has trained more than a dozen U.S. Equestrian Federation Horse of the Year winners, and he’s seen plenty of stylish hunters.



And after watching Harmony and Lucy Davis in the junior hunter ring, it’s clear that Cox isn’t exaggerating.

“Every jump she jumps is identical,” said Cox. “It’s so rare to find a horse that jumps every jump perfectly every time. That’s what puts her in that category of best of the best.”

The road that led Harmony to Cox’s Lakeview Terrace, Calif., barn began early in 2005, when Cox welcomed a talented new student. Davis, then 12, had been winning in the pony hunters for several years and arrived at Brookway Stables hoping to graduate to the juniors. There was only one problem: she didn’t have the right mount.

Cox spent most of the year on the lookout for an extraordinary horse that would match Davis’ potential.

“Mrs. Davis kept asking if I’d found the right horse, and I kept saying, ‘No, not yet,’ ” said Cox. “With Lucy, I just wouldn’t settle.”

Meanwhile, across the country in Virginia, Betty Oare and her top amateur-owner hunter Harmony were going through a tough time. After a stellar season the previous year, Harmony began suffering from intermittent soundness problems midway through the 2004 Winter

Equestrian Festival (Fla.) that put an early end to her show season. Just as the mare was getting back into form, Oare broke her leg and had to take a few months off to recover. By 2005, Oare and Harmony eased their way back into the swing of things, but something was amiss.

“That fall I wasn’t quite in sync with any of my horses,” recalled Oare. “I was coming back gradually, but it was a tough time and things weren’t working as I hoped.”

At the Capital Challenge Horse Show (Md.) that year, Cox watched Oare and Harmony lope around the

amateur-owner ring, transfixed by the horse's perfect, athletic jumping style. When Oare's trainer, Pam Baker, mentioned that the horse was for sale, Cox knew that he'd found exactly what he and the Davis family had been waiting for.

The day after the show ended, Cox drove to Warrenton, Va., to try the mare. "I got on, jumped one jump, and said I'd take her," recalled Cox. "As I was leaving the farm, I called up Mrs. Davis and said, 'I found the horse.'"

Plenty of trainers would have balked at recruiting a horse with such a powerful jump for a 12-year-old just stepping up from the ponies, but Cox knew that Davis was an unusually gifted rider who was ready for the challenge.

And as soon as she sat on Harmony, Davis knew that the horse was worth the wait. She rode her for the first time in the busy warm-up ring during the Pennsylvania National Horse Show as Cox and her mother, Kelly Davis, looked on. "She jumped one jump and came trotting up to me, grinning ear-to-ear and said, 'Mom, that was the best feeling ever!'" said Kelly.

The partnership didn't gel overnight, however. "Our first show together was a disaster," recalled Lucy. "She was fresh, we weren't getting lead changes—everything that could have gone wrong did."

Some days the mare came out of her stall relaxed enough to walk right into the show ring, and other days she would be speedy. "She's a little different every time you ride her," said Lucy. "I had to learn to acclimate myself to her. The more I practiced and went in the ring, the better we got."

Everything fell into place for Harmony and Davis in 2007. The pair picked up 15 tricolors, starting with the junior hunter, 15 and under, championship at the L.A.E.C. Opener (Calif.), and wrapping up the season with the high-point large junior hunter and large junior hunter, 15 and under, championships at the Pennsylvania National.

"Harmony's ability to perform so consistently at such a top level has really given Lucy the confidence to step up and ride well," said Cox. "When that mare walks into the ring, she gives 100 percent every single time."

Their crowning achievement occurred midway through the season, when the pair shipped 2,500 miles east to compete at Devon (Pa.). It was the first trip to the Dixon Oval for both Harmony and Davis, but they put on a performance to remember, capturing the grand junior hunter championship and prompting the judges to crown Davis best child rider.

Even though she doesn't have the same years of experience as her trainer, Davis recognizes how incredible her partner is. "She is just amazing," said Davis. "I feel so lucky every time I get on. I've never ridden any horse like her. She is just perfect."

Mollie Bailey

Personal Profile

Description: Bay, 16.2-hand, mare, 14, Holsteiner.

Residence: Brookway Stables, Lakeview Terrace, Calif.

Bit: Twisted D-ring snaffle.

Personality: "She is definitely a princess," said owner Lucy Davis. "She acts like she doesn't like attention, but when you give it to her she just loves it. It's all about her."

Friends In The Barn: "Harmony is picky about who she interacts with, and she really only likes certain people," said Davis. "She'll only let her favorite person—her groom Juan—touch her ears."

Greatest Dislike: Puddles. "If she even sees a puddle out of the corner of her eye, she'll go five feet in the opposite direction immediately," said Davis.

2007 Competitive Highlights

Devon (Pa.)—grand junior hunter champion; overall large junior hunter champion, large junior hunter, 15 and under, champion; best child rider on a horse.

Capital Challenge (Md.)—first place World Champion Hunter Rider Junior Challenge.

Pennsylvania National—large junior hunter, 15 and under, champion; high point large junior hunter.

Del Mar National (Calif.)—large junior hunter champion.

HITS Desert Circuit (Calif.)—large junior hunter, 15 and under, mid-circuit champion.

Menlo Charity (Calif.)—large junior hunter, 15 and under, champion; best junior rider award.

Oaks Blenheim June Classic II (Calif.)—large junior hunter, 15 and under, champion; first place junior hunter classic.

Oaks Blenheim Summer Classic II (Calif.)—large junior hunter, 15 and under, champion; first place junior hunter classic.