

Contents

JANUARY 1, 2010

6 Commentary



HORSE SHOWS

- 8** Zone 12: The Last Frontier Of Horse Shows
By Anne Lang

- 14** As Always Starts New Life With Lake St. Louis Win
By Molly Sorge

- 18** Ehning And Lansink Love Paris
By Pippa Cuckson

- 20** FROM THE JUDGE'S BOX: JUMPERS
With Katie Monahan Prudent

22 ADVERTISERS INDEX



BETWEEN ROUNDS

- 24** It's Important To Develop And Preserve Your Training Foundation
By Scott Hassler



FORUM

- 26** Young Riders Are Falling Through The Cracks
By Tamara Smith



DRESSAGE

- 28** SC The Jazzman Adds Some Color To The Orlando Winter Dressage Classic
By Molly Sorge

33 HORSEMEN'S DIRECTORY

34 SPORTING CALENDAR



CLASSIFIEDS

- 37** For Sale, Wanted, And Miscellaneous

40 LETTERS



IN THE COUNTRY

- 41** Brief News Headlines

43 LATE NEWS



ON THE WEB

www.chronofhorse.com
www.chronicleofmyhorse.com



photo: Anne Lang



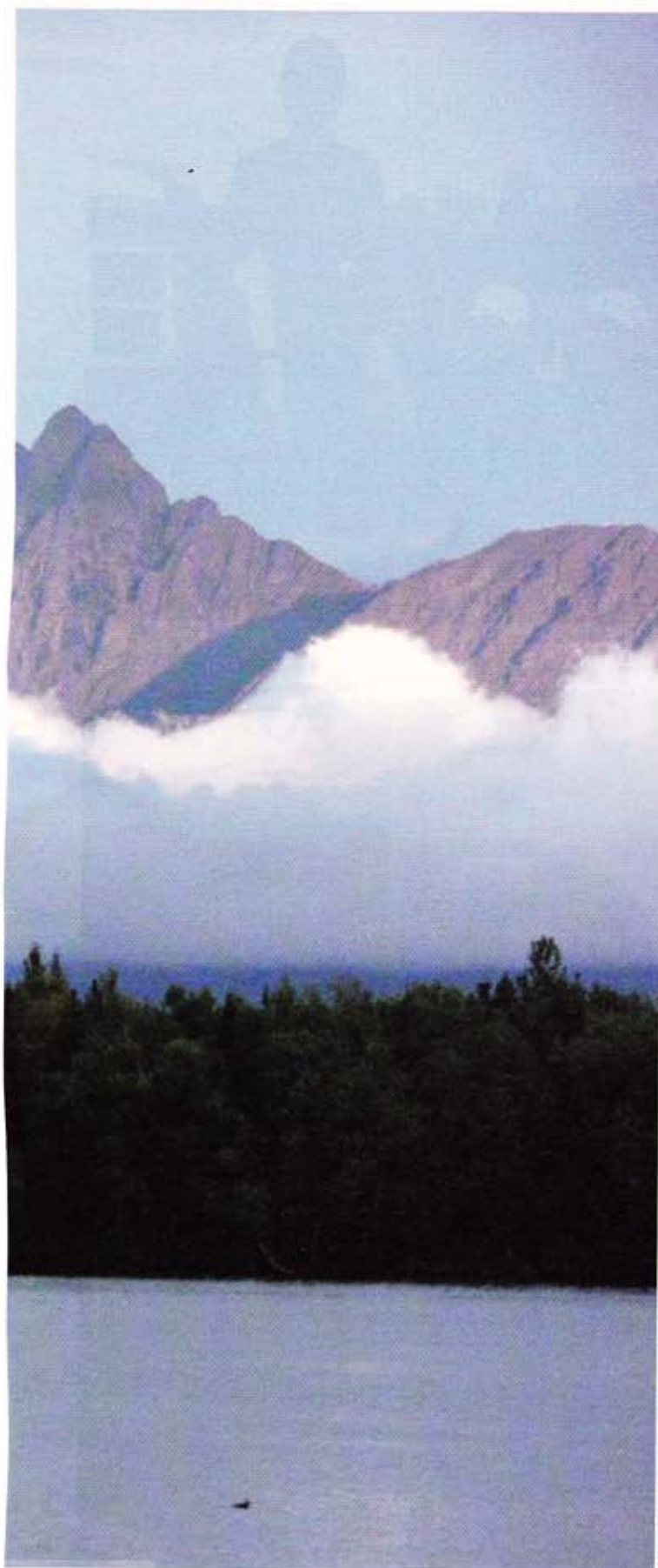
Zone 12: The Last Frontier Of Horse Shows

Rising above the challenges of merciless winters, abnormal daylight hours and geographical isolation, Alaska's hunter/jumper scene is thriving and competitive—with more similarities to the Lower 48 than one might expect.

Anne Lang

Photo:
Anne
Lang

(Anne Lang Photo)



TRAINER JENNY ROUSEY-DICK, who spent a decade of her life in balmy California, illustrated a prevailing rationale for choosing to reside and work in Alaska's hunter/jumper world.

"No matter where you live," Rousey-Dick pointed out, "there are tradeoffs. Living in Alaska, you trade the harsh and difficult winters for the gorgeous scenery and unbelievably beautiful summers."

"The summers suck you in," Rousey-Dick declared, "and you think: 'OK, I can stick it out for another winter.' Because right behind it, you know there's the promise of another spectacular summer. And then you just can't leave."

Rousey-Dick's sentiments are shared by many others in the Alaska hunter/jumper community, where a relatively short summer reigns as the sole season during which to show—in state, that is.

Winter shows are not logistically feasible in Alaska. While a number of barns include sizeable indoor arenas and state-of-the-art amenities, none of these private facilities could provide the volume of guest stabling, enclosed schooling areas, van parking and spectator space necessary for hosting U.S. Equestrian Federation-rated winter events.

"The summers suck you in and you think: OK, I can stick it out for another winter."

Jenny Rousey-Dick

Also, road conditions for hauling can be treacherous and unpredictable during winter months in Alaska, especially farther north. So most horse people prefer to stay put.

However, Alaskan hunter/jumper riders and trainers largely view the abbreviated show season as a benefit. It means they have all winter to hone their skills, bring along green horses and methodically treat medical issues or injuries without feeling as though the state's show circuit is rocketing along without them.

Regional pressure is off as well, since Alaska and Hawaii are the only states that comprise their own separate USEF zones.

There are challenges, to be sure. Even in the more southern city of Anchorage, where the majority of the state's hunter/jumper show barns are based, average winter temperatures fall well below freezing in daytime. Nighttime digits that drop below zero are not uncommon.

Wind-chill factors are ruthlessly wicked. Rain adds layers of ice to mounds of snow in paddocks and parking lots. Manure freezes to the ground and must be trucked out of town for disposal if a barn is in Anchorage.

Winter turnout is risky, because horses that play too hard can potentially injure themselves and not realize it in the numbing cold. In Anchorage, on the shortest winter days, the sun doesn't show up until around 10:30 a.m.—and disappears just five hours later. Most hay is imported from out of state, and feed bills are painfully steep.

But Alaskan horse owners respond with trademark resiliency to all of this and more. They pile on extra-heavy blankets with hoods or let their horses' coats grow out completely. They make sure their equines' cold-weather nutritional needs are met, and they add just enough heat to their stables and arenas to create comfort while avoiding respiratory problems.

They ride indoors under lights, or outdoors with ice shoes. They monitor their horses' turnout, and they arm themselves with super-duty snowplows. They sacrifice personal needs and luxuries



HORSE SHOWS

Trainer Jenny Rousey-Dick (*center*) believes that because there are so few shows in Alaska, each competition is particularly meaningful to the riders, such as her student Tyler Norton. Rachel Sindorf (*left*) is Rousey-Dick's assistant trainer.

in order to bankroll their beloved hobby, and they soldier on.

Because that promise of a dazzling summer always comes through.

► Pathways To A Wider World

The Alaska Hunter/Jumper Association and Alaska State Horseshows Inc., organize and manage Alaska's hunter/jumper shows, which typically number only four or five each summer, normally located in the Anchorage area or outlying communities. Exhibitors come from as far away as Fairbanks (350 miles to the north).

The USEF and U.S. Hunter Jumper Association Zone 12 Hunter/Jumper Committee also play a big role in horse show affairs. Among the committee's many activities is an annual benefit clinic designed to encourage Alaska riders to aim for national championship points in Young Riders, Prix des States, junior and pony jumpers. Past clinicians have included Greg Best, Hap Hansen, Rob Gage, Norman Dello Joio, Ray Texel and Bernie Traurig.

Bill Turner is chairman of the Zone 12 Hunter/Jumper Committee, and Kerri Geppert coordinates the committee's Horsemanship Challenge, the purpose of which is "to encourage young riders [in all disciplines] to learn, practice and appreciate all the elements of the equine world." Participants earn points toward annual awards in the categories of riding, practical skills and written tests.

Geppert said the program's purpose is to offer youngsters "exposure to basic horsemanship, such as putting together a bridle, wrapping a leg, that sort of thing. It's mostly geared toward kids just starting out riding. We do this as a grassroots effort through the USHJA.

"It's a way to show youngsters the reasons for what we do with the horses," Geppert continued, "and that this sport involves more than just showing up, putting on a saddle and going out to ride in classes. Some of the focus is on getting a horse ready for a show and how to take care of it while it's at the show."

Geppert believes it's important for young people to develop a bond with their horses. "That bond comes through as they rise through the levels of difficulty in their riding," she said. "This program also bridges the gap between Pony Club members and USEF members,

Jaimie Thurman, head trainer at Diamond H Ranch in Anchorage, is one of many equestrians who have competed outside the state and brought their experience back to Alaska.



(Anne Lang Photos)



Photos:
Anne
Lang



"I think people would be surprised to see the level of riding and talented individuals that Alaska is able to produce with limited resources."

—Brena Doolen

which is good up here because we have a relatively small pool of competitive riders."

Geppert's daughter Emily, 17, is part of that pool. Under trainer Carrie Patnode, Emily shows her horse Mahadi in children's jumpers and various hunter classes in Alaska. But she's also one of numerous Alaska riders who have journeyed outside the state to learn and compete.

Last winter, Emily spent two months competing on the HITS Desert Circuit (Calif.), with trainer Hap Hansen. She rode Jazmiro, owned by Dylan Kornbluth, to the mid-circuit cham-

pionship and circuit championship in the children's jumper, 16-17, division.

Emily kept up with her studies at the HITS on-site school. Geppert and her husband Steve (who often acts as photographer at Alaska shows) sent Emily to Thermal "so she could see the bigger world. It was very eye-opening for her: She was prepared to work, so she was pretty surprised when she showed up and the grooms had the horses ready.

"It was a thrill for Emily to actually see the riders and horses she'd only read about," Geppert added, "and she learned so much

Alaska's Hunter/Jumper World: A Historic View

Lifelong Alaskan Jill Cornforth is regarded by many as a "walking historian" on Alaska's hunter/jumper evolution.

A former chairman of Zone 12 and the Zone 12 Young Rider Program, Cornforth served on numerous committees of Alaska State Horseshows Inc., for many years.

Professionally, Cornforth has mostly worked in Alaska's construction industry, which has taken her to remote jobsites such as Prudhoe Bay on the state's rugged North Slope. In the early 1990s, Cornforth conducted a small lesson/training business as a primary source of income. She did that again from 1999-02, and now trains one horse and rider during limited time off from her job as office manager and project control engineer for an Anchorage construction company.

At age 8, Cornforth began taking lessons from former East Coast trainer Minot Howard of Wynfromere Farms in Fairbanks.

"Mr. Howard provided many Fairbanksans a well-rounded education in horsemanship," Cornforth recalled. "While hunter/jumper oriented, we were exposed to a wide range of experiences that included riding on cross-country trails, memorizing and riding dressage tests at a young age, assisting with Mr. Howard's pony-ride operation at the local fair, riding Roman-style over jumps, jumping bareback and learning to drive ponies in carts."

In the summer of 1983, Cornforth worked for trainer Wilson Dennehy at several large Midwestern shows and at Lake Placid (N.Y.).

"It was a great education," Cornforth stated, "and my first chance to see some of the country's best riders in action—Michael Matz, Joe Fargis, Katie Monahan, Leslie Burr—who I previously knew only through the pages of *The Chronicle of the Horse*."

She also showed with Judy Richter and Andre Dignelli in 1990 and 1991. "It was a wonderful opportunity to learn from top-caliber trainers," she said.

Cornforth has seen the number of recognized Alaska horse shows decline over the years. "In the late 70s, there were recognized shows every weekend from Memorial Day to Labor Day, with an occasional weekend offering a show in both Fairbanks and Anchorage," she said.

Jill Cornforth competed in her first show in 1965 and is still active in the Alaskan horse show scene.

Cornforth competed in her first show in 1965, held on the Park Strip in downtown Anchorage. "Mr. Howard transported several horses from Fairbanks to Anchorage via the Alaska Railroad, about a 12-hour trip," she said.

"Alaska shows used to offer all disciplines—hunter/jumper, dressage, western, saddle seat and gymkhana—but now they're more specialized," she added.

Cornforth is appreciative of the steady stream of experts who have shared their knowledge with Alaskan hunter/jumper riders, including Richter, Victor Hugo-Vidal, Wilson Dennehy and Hap Hansen, as well as Mark Mullen, Jimmy Lee, Greg Best, Anthony D'Ambrosio, Linda Allen, Larry Langer, Kenny Krome, Rob Gage, Bernie Traurig and Ray Texel.

A number of Alaskans have been "instrumental to the early development of the hunter/jumper industry in this state," she added. Among them were Howard and Sammye Taplin, who in 1959 founded Diamond H Ranch in Anchorage.

"Their daughter, Linda McQueary, continues to run the stable and teach," Cornforth said.

For the future, Cornforth would like to see the Alaskan hunter/jumper horse industry grow. "With more quality horses, and a show circuit that is truly statewide, with participation from all levels," she said.



(Greg Mordanel Photo)



Photo:
Anne
Lang

(Anne Lang Photo)

For most Alaskan riders, the promise of another beautiful summer keeps them from fleeing during the brutal winters.

just by watching them. She rode in bigger classes, over bigger fences, and it was a huge confidence-builder."

Geppert recalled one incident with amusement. "Emily rode in a children's/adult classic that was held in the giant grand prix ring, and when they announced: 'Emily Geppert from Chugiak, Alaska,' you could hear people saying: 'What? Did they say Alaska?'"

While Geppert said she'd send her daughter to California again in a heartbeat, it's not cheap. "It's a minimum of \$3,000, one way, just for the trip. And if you drive out, it's five days—with eight to 10 hours a day in a horse trailer—just to get to Washington state.

"So it's hard for the kids up here to get out and get exposure," Geppert said. "But we have great trainers in Alaska and good horses. Yes, our numbers are small, but these kids work hard—and they're competitive."

► Pride And Prejudice

ASH President Brena Doolen grew up in Anchorage and rode in hunter/jumper, equitation and dressage. After high school, she served an eight-month internship at Foxhill Farm in Pennsylvania, working with Sharon Best and Karen Karkow.

Doolen then transferred to a Quarter Horse hunter facility in Texas. From there, she attended Virginia Intermont College, where she rode on the school's Intercollegiate Horse Shows Association, Intercollegiate Dressage Association and International Student Riding Association teams. Graduating in 2005, Doolen returned to Anchorage. She married in 2007 and works fulltime for British Petroleum.

"When I went to college," Doolen recalled, "some people were surprised that I could even sit on a horse, because they think we're unable to get the type of riding education that they get.

"Definitely, it's more difficult to gain experience here," admitted Doolen, 28. "But we make it work. We've had clinics with world-class trainers and riders, and a lot of our riders and trainers are willing to travel to become more educated.

"I think people would be surprised to see the level of riding and talented individuals that Alaska is able to produce with limited resources," she continued.

Rousey-Dick shares Doolen's pride in the caliber of their home state's equestrians.

"There's a lot of talent up here," Rousey-Dick said, "and because it's so difficult and expensive to have hunters and jumpers in Alaska, the people who do it take it very seriously. So I think they put out even more effort than a lot of people in this sport."

She added that because there are only a handful of hunter/jumper shows in Alaska each summer, every show is particularly meaningful to the riders.

Born and raised on a large Alaska horse ranch, Rousey-Dick eventually began taking hunter seat lessons. In the early 1980s, she entered Marymount College, near her former Alaska hunter/jumper trainer's breeding enterprise in California.

Rousey-Dick, now 45, worked at that facility, then moved to Huntington Beach for a five-year stint as assistant trainer and barn manager for Victor Hugo-Vidal, who had a long history of bolstering Alaska's hunter/jumper industry with quality horses and expert instruction during his frequent visits.



Rousey-Dick then met her future husband. "He had always wanted to move to Alaska," Rousey-Dick said, "so I said 'OK,' since I still had family here and figured I could do horses back here, too."

That was 20 years ago, and Rousey-Dick has indeed been "doing horses" in Alaska ever since. Currently, she's the head trainer at Sindorf Equestrian Centre in the Palmer-Wasilla area. Sindorf, which opened in 2005, is backed by a corporation created by 10 women (including Rousey-Dick), each of whom brings different talents and expertise to the table.

Most of the 10-acre property was donated by Marion Sindorf, whose granddaughter, Rachel, is assistant trainer.

Sindorf features an 80' x 180' indoor arena, a 120' x 240' outdoor arena, 26 12' x 12' stalls, two heated wash racks, a large tack room, spacious office, seven turnout pens and trails dotted with cross-country jumps.

Rousey-Dick is one of the few trainers in Alaska engaged full-time in her profession.

"This is a difficult business to start with," Rousey-Dick noted, "any place you go. Up here, what also makes it hard is the limited number of facilities that you can work out of year-round and the huge expense involved."

Selecting the right horse is especially key in Alaska, where many riders own just one mount, and often that horse is asked to perform double duty as both a hunter and a low- to mid-level jumper. For sale horses, Rousey-Dick takes customers to Washington, Oregon or California. Some Alaska trainers also travel to British Columbia.

"We try to stay on the West Coast," Rousey-Dick explained, "because shipping from anywhere else is so astronomically expensive."

The most common breed in Alaska right now is probably the Thoroughbred, said Rousey-Dick. "But that's not always the case," she added. "It's usually kind of an eclectic mix. For a while, we had a wave of warmbloods."

► Progress Is Evident

Rousey-Dick is optimistic about the future of hunters and jumpers in Alaska.

"Every year," she noted, "it gets better. All the shows keep trying to step it up to a better quality, like offering the modified

hunter derbies. We're trying to get that going here so we don't get left behind."

The riders and horses at the Alaska USEF-rated shows definitely look and ride the part, from sartorial properness to braided manes and tails and overall polish.

"It's such a sport of discipline that I think everyone needs to learn it [and it] shouldn't be taken lightly," Rousey-Dick said. "It's a privilege. The horses require a certain level of care, and they should be turned out a certain way. We shouldn't be lackadaisical about it."

Jaimie Thurman is head trainer at Diamond H Ranch in Anchorage, one of four major show barns in that city. (The others include Sindorf, Eaton Equestrian Centre and Huffman Horse Center).

Like Rousey-Dick, Thurman was born and raised in Alaska. And like Rousey-Dick, she experimented with training outside—Washington, in Thurman's case—but came back home.

Thurman, who now lives in Wasilla, is married. Her 2-year-old twin daughters, Brooklyn and Devon, already compete in leadline. Their busy mother teaches riding three days a week, trading off with an assistant trainer at Diamond H.

"Growing up, we rode outdoors year-round," Thurman said with a shrug. "We just plowed the arena. Horses that get ridden outside in winter here generally get ice shoes. You can walk, trot and canter, but definitely no jumping."

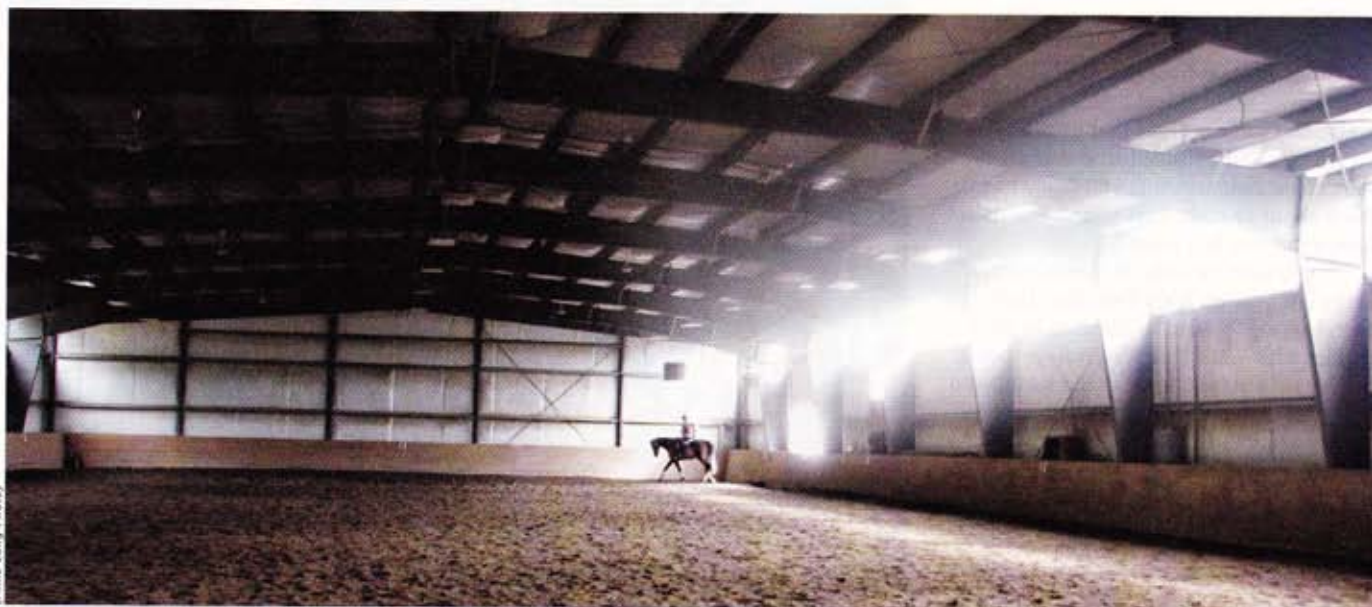
Still, she admitted that the expense and the short summers are big challenges.

"We have to ride in the very limited, crowded space of indoor arenas during winter, and we're only able to ride outside for about a month in the spring before we go to our first horse show," she said. "So a lot of times, the horses start the show season with a shorter stride and aren't able to really clock around the courses right off the bat."

Thurman, 25, is aware of the common misconceptions outsiders might have about Alaska.

"They might feel that we don't play by the rules," she observed, "or that our riders don't keep up with the riders outside. Yet every clinician who's come up here has been very complimentary, and they've stressed that our riders could keep up with any of the kids in the Lower 48, if appropriately mounted." ◀

For more information about showing in Alaska, go to www.chronofhorse.com/alaska.



Indoor arenas with lights are a fact of life during Alaska winters.

Photo:
Anne
Lang

(Anne Lang Photo)



Photo:
Anne
Lang

Alaska's beauty keeps horsemen like Julie Eaton and her daughters in the state, even if it doesn't have the biggest horse show scene.

(Anne Lang Photo)



The Eatons Have Devoted Two Generations To Horse Showing In Alaska

And they've contributed to the formation of a close-knit community of Alaskan horsemen.

Anne Lang

THE ROOTS OF Eaton Equestrian Centre in Anchorage, Alaska, reach back to 1969, when Julie Eaton left her native Buffalo, N.Y., and moved to Alaska with her husband.

Already a talented artist, Eaton developed a new passion in 1975, when she began riding.

By 1980, Eaton was a single parent of two daughters—Dana, 7, and Britta, 10—looking for ways to supplement her earnings. That's when the concept of a riding school took hold.

"Before that," Julie said, "I'd worked to help develop a public equestrian center in Anchorage, so I'd learned a lot along the way. I'd been a working artist, but I let that go to devote myself full time to my new business."

Julie launched the EEC, one of the main hunter/jumper show barns in Anchorage, in 1980, and she still owns, manages and teaches there along with daughters Dana and Britta and Dana's husband Michael.

EEC offers a full boarding, lesson and training program. The attractive facility makes efficient use of 2.5 acres, with a spacious indoor arena, 16 box stalls, two paddocks and numerous 12'x24' turnout pens. A second-floor trophy room overlooks the arena, and the Eatons' cozy A-frame home sits on a small hill just up from the stables.

"I knew that hunter/jumper riding isn't a traditional sport in Alaska," Julie confessed. "But this type of business allowed me more time to spend with my daughters, because it's based at home."

Of course, considerable capital was needed to develop EEC. "My first horse was appropriately named Empty Pockets," said Julie with a laugh.

She wasn't shy about seeking counsel from experts. She credited Victor Hugo-Vidal, a frequent judge and visiting clini-

cian in Alaska, "for giving me great advice over the years and for bringing suitable hunters and jumpers to the area."

Like most trainers' children, Dana and Britta rode from an early age. When they got older, the girls helped their mother with the beginner students. Over time, Britta's interests became focused primarily on teaching and breeding, while Dana quickly rose through the state's junior ranks and set her sights on show jumping.

During one Christmas visit to Julie's hometown of Buffalo, she arranged for Dana to take a lesson at Susie Schoellkopf's barn.

"Susie saw Dana ride," Julie remembered, "and invited her to compete in a local horse show class. Susie was so kind, and it was a wonderful experience that affected Dana later in life, when she chose

to go to school at Canisius College in Buffalo."

Canisius had an intercollegiate team, and Dana took along a horse, Second Chance, or "Stilts," a Quarter Horse bred in Alaska by the Eatons, out of Julie's mare Empty Pockets.

"Dana braided at shows and did other work to help defray her riding expenses in New York," said Julie.

Later, Dana earned a master's degree in economics at the University of Oregon, where she met her husband of 10 years, Michael Enz, a professor who now spends winters teaching economics at Framingham State College in Massachusetts. But Enz spends college breaks and summers with the Eatons in Anchorage, where he helps manage some of the AHJA shows that EEC organizes.



Julie Eaton developed Eaton Equestrian Centre in 1980, and her daughters Britta Eaton (shown on Nashville) and Dana Eaton have shared her love of horses.

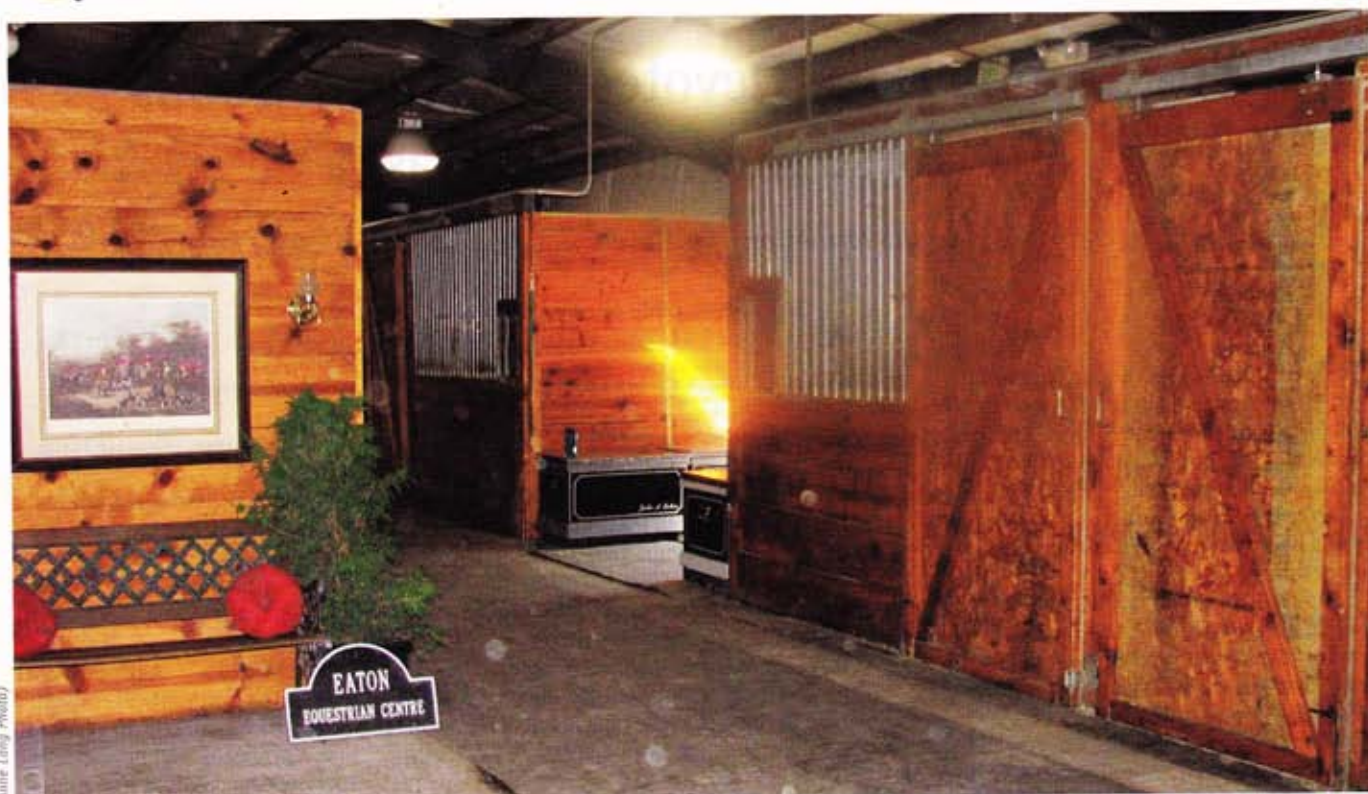


Photo:
Anne
Lang

Although it keeps out Alaska's harsh winters, the Eaton Equestrian Centre looks much like any other equestrian facility on the inside.

A Rising Star

While still an undergraduate, Dana qualified for show jumping at the North American Young Rider Championships, a rare coup for an Alaskan, although fellow Alaskan Danielle Turner also rode in the NAYRC during the same years as Dana.

At the 1993 NAYRC, Dana rode Empire State, leased from Beezie Madden, and finished seventh overall. In 1994, Dana again qualified for the NAYRC, this time finishing fifth on Stilts. Earlier that summer, Dana and Stilts had won tricolors at Detroit (Mich.), Cincinnati (Ohio) and Saratoga (N.Y.).

Rather than being treated like an oddity, or ignored, for being from such a far-flung territory, Dana said she was mostly met with friendliness on the prominent show circuits and at the NAYRC.

As Julie observed: "There's such a mystique about Alaska that it actually ended up opening more doors for Dana than perhaps if she'd been from a more mainstream state. People are curious, and they want to see what you can do."

"There are riders up here who can go and compete successfully anywhere."

—Julie Eaton

Knowledge and skills passed down from both generations of Eatons have benefited countless students at EEC. Several of the school's riders—and Dana—have competed at the HITS Desert Circuit shows in California in recent years, earning championships in jumper divisions ranging from level 3 to level 7.

All of this, plus the accomplishments of riders from several other Alaska barns at the major winter show circuits, underscores a message that the state's hunter/jumper contingent wants the world to receive: "There are riders up here who can go and compete successfully anywhere," Julie pointed out, "given the right environment."

But stereotypes tend to linger. "A few years ago," Julie said, "there was a picture in the newspaper of a moose jumping over a fence. He was in perfect form, with a beautifully rounded neck and his chin tucked between his knees. But that photo also seemed to symbolize what many outsiders probably think of when they try to imagine the hunter/jumper scene in Alaska: A moose going over a jump." She ruefully shook her head.



"I knew that hunter/jumper riding isn't a traditional sport in Alaska," said Julie Eaton, shown on her homebred mare Second Chance in 1989. "But this type of business allowed me more time to spend with my daughters, because it's based at home."



Like many Alaskan trainers, Dana Eaton (second from left) does a little of everything at shows—braiding, longeing, grooming, riding, schooling and training.

"What's frustrating," Dana added, "is when judges come up here thinking that we don't know how showing works on the outside. We only have four shows, but we take them very seriously. We may not have the money that a lot of people outside have, but that doesn't mean we don't have the preparation and the presentation.

"A lot of our kids can really ride," Dana added. "They want to be challenged by the courses and the judges. They want the tests to be legit; they don't want everything dumbed down for them. Even if some of them might not ride as well as outside riders, they want a chance to try."

Grassroots Knowledge

At EEC, as with many stables anywhere, students start by learning basic horsemanship, including horse care. Some of this education stems from practicality.

"We don't have staff," explained Dana, 36, "but we have several working students. Britta feeds in the morning. Working students feed in the evening, and they clean stalls.

"There's a unique sense of community and a hands-on dynamic that exists in the hunter/jumper world here."

—Dana Eaton

"Some of our clients prefer to work for their lessons," Dana said, "so it's a good situation all around. But some families do it because they want their children to have the full experience of caring for horses—to actually work and learn along the way."

Some EEC students help groom at shows, and this assistance is crucial for Dana, because, like many Alaska hunter/jumper trainers, "at the shows, I'm braiding, longeing, grooming, riding, schooling and training. That's one of the things that sets us apart from the outside."

Britta, 39, is appreciative of help from EEC students at home, since she juggles management of the stables, teaching lessons and supervising EEC's breeding program. The Eatons also have an Irish stallion, several broodmares and assorted homebred colts and fillies.

Said Britta: "We haven't always been able to afford to go outside and make pur-



Photo: Anne Lang

(Anne Lang Photo)

chases to get what we want, but through the years, we've been pretty successful at breeding to get what we want. One of Dana's jumpers [now retired], whom we bred and who did levels 7 and 8, wouldn't have been affordable for us to buy."

Overall, it's a good life at EEC, and the Eatons are content to call Alaska home.

"I always enjoy showing outside," Dana

mused, "but I also love coming home, because there's a unique sense of community and a hands-on dynamic that exists in the hunter/jumper world here."

Julie concurred: "When the girls became adults, I started looking outside for a place to move to. But there's just something about the people here. Obviously, I ended up staying." ■

Holding Their Own

Grand prix show jumper Hap Hansen, of California, has visited Alaska numerous times to judge and conduct clinics over the past 20 years.

"When I first went up there," Hansen said, "the riding was a little bit on the novice side. But over time, it's improved a lot. They try really hard, and they have good professionals. But they're really handicapped by their short show season, by only having a few shows, and by only having a limited pool of horses for people to buy."

Hansen believes that numerous Alaska hunter/jumper riders could hold their own at recognized shows in the Lower 48. He referenced Emily Geppert, who trained with him at the HITS Desert Circuit (Calif.), and earned the circuit championship in the older children's jumpers on a horse she leased from Hansen.

Wilson Dennehy—trainer, judge and former national equitation champion—is based in Colorado, but his connections to Alaska trace back several decades.

"I came up here to judge a horse show in Fairbanks 34 years ago," Dennehy said. "Since then, I've been back here many times to do clinics, usually several times a year.

"The improvement that the whole thing has undergone has been fantastic, phenomenal," Dennehy declared. "What's helped the progress are people like Dana [Eaton] and her mother, who've had some good, proper training, and are now training others in turn. So the number of decent riders here has expanded tremendously."

Dennehy, 71, can relate to misconceptions about geographical areas.

"I grew up in Illinois," he said, "and back when I won the MacLay and the Medal Finals, people still thought Chicago was full of cowboys and Indians. So I know exactly what it's like to be stereotyped.

"Truthfully," Dennehy added, "I think a lot of people don't even know what's going on up here. They just assume that the riders are very backwoods. Yes, maybe they're not as advanced as riders in some other parts of the country, but there are some very competent riders and trainers in Alaska. And things are getting better all the time."

Hall Helps Keep Alaska on National Radar

By Anne Lang

Created 12/31/2009 - 11:33

By now, 16-year-old Alicia Hall is used to causing a lot of raised eyebrows - both inside and outside of Alaska - for eschewing a trainer in order to ride on her own. The situation might not garner any attention if Hall wasn't a major player on the Alaska hunter/jumper circuit and an accomplished competitor at some premier shows in the Lower 48. But the junior rider is both of those things.

"I started out with a trainer," Hall explained, "but all the trainers are in Anchorage, and I live in Homer [a remote seaside community located 220 miles south of the city]. I couldn't go down there every day, so my dad and I just split off and did our own thing.

"I have a pretty good feel for my horses," Hall added, "so if there's something wrong, I can usually fix it."

That brand of confidence, combined with a dash of fearlessness and raw talent, has contributed to Hall's notable success on ponies and horses, particularly in the jumper realm.

Hall began riding at age 5, but didn't start showing until she was 11. That year, she qualified her large pony hunter for the 2005 USEF National Pony Finals. Hall and her Connemara mare, My Shiny Penny, flew down to Kentucky to compete (as did Alaska rider Kaitlin Henry on Grey Ghost, who ended up on the 5th-placed pony jumper team).

Every year since then, Hall has returned to Pony Finals to represent Zone 12 in the jumper championships. (For the team phase, Zone 12 is usually combined with at least one another zone in order to comprise a full squad.)

At the 2006 Pony Finals, in the individual jumper phase, Hall placed 9th on her pony, Luigi. In 2008, she competed with a broken ankle and finished 12th overall in the individual phase. This past summer, Hall and Luigi competed on the jumper team that finished 7th.

But 2009 has been an especially good year for Hall. On Araucano, her Holsteiner, Hall placed 3rd out of 95 riders in the \$25,000 Marshall & Sterling Child/Adult Jumper Classic at the Ocala (Fla.) Winter Celebration. The pair also won the children's jumper championship at the Kentucky Summer Classic in Lexington.

At the 2009 Ocala Winter Finals, Hall and Luigi won the pony jumper championship, and were reserve champions in that division at the Ocala Winter Celebration.

From riding in Alaska hunter/jumper shows, Hall has collected an impressive number of tricolors and awards for year-end, circuit and zone categories on her ponies and horses.

In-state, Hall competes on a diverse assortment of mounts: Calamari, her Arabian, does the modified jumpers and level 0; Sugar 'n' Spice, a mustang acquired in Colorado, does level 1, level 2 and children's jumper; and My Shiny Penny does mostly large pony hunter and hunter performance classes. Hall also owns a miniature horse that she sometimes shows in driving classes.

Nature Nurtures Talent

Home for high school junior Hall and all of her equines is the 90-acre Portage Valley Ranch. The rural setting is familiar to Hall's father, Henry Tomingas, who grew up on a ranch in Wyoming; and her mother, Ruth Hall, who comes from a farm in Maine. Hall is the only child of the couple, who accompany her to shows.

When Hall practices at the ranch, Tomingas is a big help, she said.

"My dad sets the jumps for me," Hall said, "although I really only ride and jump at the shows. At home I have a 60-foot round pen, where I set up gymnastics. I figure, if my horses can learn to set their own distance and get their feet up, that's going to take them farther than if I'm sitting on them with an extra 130 pounds on their backs, telling them what to do all the time."

Between schooling sessions, "my horses just hang out in the pasture," Hall said. "They're always outside and moving around, so they stay in good condition."

Hall acknowledged that horse-keeping in rural Alaska would not appeal to everyone.

"Winters are hardest," Hall stated, "because we don't have a barn [just a covered shelter]. We work to keep the horses warm, but not TOO warm. We keep our really heavy blankets handy because sometimes it will rain and hail and snow all at once, with high winds and temperatures of 40 below zero. So we try to save our heaviest blankets for those times."

But most of the time, she added, "our horses don't wear blankets. They just grow really thick coats."

While Hall is thrilled to travel to horse shows outside, she does enjoy living in Alaska.

"Where we live is the perfect place to have horses," she said, "because we're surrounded by mountains, so it's warmer. The sunlight makes the meadows very green in summer. My friend and I like to trail-ride along a river with lots of salmon in it, and we stop to fish. We let our horses go barefoot on the farm because the soil is boggy in summer, and it sucks the shoes off. We just make sure to keep their feet filed.

"In winter," Hall continued, "when we get a lot of snow, the horses love to bound through it. It's fun to ride in that deep kind of snow. You just have to be careful when it rains and turns the snow to ice. Because it when it snows again, you've got snow on top of ice. The layers just build



up, and it's tricky because you don't know if there's ice under the snow where you're riding, which can cause your horse to slip or pull a tendon."

Her opinion of the Lower 48, in general?

"It definitely has more buildings, skyscrapers and freeways," Hall observed, "whereas in most parts of Alaska, things are more mellow, laidback and natural."

Outside of Alaska, Hall is excited about an offer she received while showing in Kentucky last summer: An owner from Venezuela has offered to hire her to come down to her farm in Wellington, Fla., to exercise and show her 26 horses, many of which are for sale. Hall is considering the offer.

"I wouldn't miss school," she reasoned. "I'd just fly down on long weekends and during breaks."

Beyond that, Hall realizes it will soon be time to choose a college path, and she's not yet sure whether she wants to limit her search to schools that offer equestrian scholarships. Many potential options seem to be available to her.

"I'd like to do Young Riders," Hall said, "but I don't have a horse yet. And someday I might like to go pro and do the Grand Prix. I haven't decided anything. But I've got lots of time to make up my mind."

Recollections of Alaska's "Inside"

By Anne Lang

Created 12/31/2009 - 11:40

The Alaskans have one simple word to define the world beyond their borders: Outside.

Among the state's residents, you don't often hear references to "The Lower 48," or "elsewhere." Just... "outside."

But despite quickly learning that fact during a whirlwind, six-day trip to Alaska last August, I never once was made to feel like an "outsider." Not at the recognized horse show I covered for the *Chronicle* (9/4/09 issue), not on my visits to some local hunter/jumper barns, and not while exploring during scattered pockets of free time.

I discovered Alaskans to be among the friendliest people I've ever met. There were no forced or false manners, just kindness and courtesy. Talk about a warm welcome. It's enough to melt an iceberg.

Speaking of icebergs, miniature versions of those are quite possible to find, even in the waning days of summer near Anchorage. One day, with a few hours to spare, I drove 50 miles southeast on scenic Seward Highway to view Portage Glacier. This venerable formation majestically looms above Prince William Sound in the Chugach National Forest.

There was indeed a very small iceberg (more specifically, an ice *chunk* that had fallen from the glacier) drifting along in frigid Portage Lake. Gazing up at snow-streaked Portage Glacier, I stood motionless for a long time – utterly spellbound. No guidebook ever could have prepared me for the magnificent, hushed beauty of that setting.

That's just how it is in Alaska (at least the tiny fraction of it that I was able to see): It seems like no matter where you are, or what direction you're facing, there's a postcard-perfect backdrop in the distance.

Even at the hunter/jumper show in Palmer, the surrounding Chugach and Talkeetna Mountains (though usually shrouded in fog) provided a dramatic, living picture frame around the horses jumping in arenas far below.

I also had a chance to stop by the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center, where I delighted in the opportunity to snap extremely close-up photos of moose, elk, bison, caribou, musk ox and bear wandering in expansive, natural surroundings. As if on cue, a bald eagle even swooped down to perch on a wooden fencepost.

Back in the city, I power-toured through the Anchorage Museum of History and Art – absorbing quick but fascinating lessons on the turbulent timeline, diverse heritage, cultural traditions and modern progression of Alaska that I sheepishly did not remember from my high school history classes.

Rushed though I often was, I did make some time to partake of the regional cuisine. Every single night, my unwavering choice of entrée was salmon, in varying forms. Suffice it to say, no fish I've consumed since that trip has measured up to the wildly flavorful and tender salmon of Alaska – just hours fresh from nearby bountiful seaways.

As for other culinary adventures, I managed to resist sampling the local sausage made from reindeer (I'm not kidding), but did ship a few links home to my husband. They're still sitting in our freezer.

August weather in Anchorage was wonderfully cool, though rainy for much of the horse show. Temperatures ranged from the high 50s to mid-60s on most days, and fell to the upper 40s at night. One late afternoon at the show, the sun came out to stay – and the mercury rose to a blistering 72 degrees. That lasted an hour, then everyone donned jackets again.

The elusive sun, when it did appear, rose at about 5:30 AM – and tended to linger until nearly 11:00 PM! Of course, this thoroughly confused my body's internal clock – which is always slow to acclimate *any* time I leapfrog over a few time zones. Anchorage residents say that in their city during the summer solstice, the sun rises around 4:00 AM and doesn't set until nearly midnight.

Alaska's bonus daylight hours definitely evoke a sense of prolonged wakefulness and energy. I sat up late each night on my balcony at a lakeside inn, mesmerized by watching seaplanes taking off and landing just yards from shore.

Ultimately, what I brought "outside" from Alaska – besides fabulous memories, some native artwork and (miraculously) just one mosquito bite – was a deep-seated longing to return. I've even started wondering how my mare might adjust to an honest-to-goodness winter.