

Athletic Partnering



...for International Competition

By Hannah Ross
- photos by Derith Vogt -

Athlete: one trained to contend in exercises requiring great physical agility and strength; one who has great activity and strength; a champion.

When someone speaks of an athlete, most think of a human participating in some sport. I think of Fantasia. Fantasia (Fan) is a 16-year-old Thoroughbred mare that I have had the opportunity to compete and develop a relationship with over the past two years.

When people think of riding horses, most think horses do the work and the rider "gets up there and sits." That couldn't be further from the truth in "Eventing." Fan and I have been on a strict training schedule the entire competition season. At every International/National competition, veterinarians are amazed at her fitness. Multiple times, when we're asked her age and I respond, "16," the vets do a double-take, as her age is usually guessed at 10-12 years.

During the highest point of our competition conditioning, our workweek goes as follows:

Monday: 15 min. trot, 3-5 min. canters, 10-min. trot.

Tuesday: Dressage

Wednesday: Dressage

Thurs.: Hills- 2 trots, 2 canters, 3 sprints

Friday: Day off

Saturday: Dressage practice

Sunday: Hack

We slowly build up to this schedule and Fan spends 20 minutes warming up/ stretching out, as do most athletes, with lots of time spent building her back and core. Though jumping is an enormous part of our competitions, we only practice approximately twice a month, making sure the "buttons" are there and she's responding to my aids properly.

Why spend all this time conditioning? Because the type of



competing we do is 3-Day Eventing (triathlon for horse and rider) at the Preliminary Level!

At competitions, we are required to do a four-minute dressage test with movements such as shoulder in, trot/canter lengthenings, and walk-to-canter(s) at prescribed markers in an arena.

The next phase is cross-country. This course is approximately two miles long, with a completion time of around five minutes. It features an average of 25 jumping efforts over solid obstacles, including bounces, skinnies, banks and water complexes. Penalties are added for refusals and/or run-outs and time faults (too fast/slow).

The final phase, show jumping, averages 10 jumps over brightly-colored collapsible obstacles in an arena. You're penalized for time faults and knocking down rails. The total penalties from the three phases are tallied and the pair with the lowest penalties wins.

Fan and I began competing at the "preliminary" level last July and have finished in third place 4 times. We have also found ourselves in ninth place, fourth place, and sixth place; also in first place on one occasion this spring! We've never been eliminated from competition and only once did we have a cross-country jumping penalty (my fault). As a result of our consistent performances, we were selected to participate in the North Americans Young Rider Championship (NAYRC). NAYRC, was held at the Virginia Horse Park, July 31-August 5. Fan and I are the second pair from Iowa to be selected to compete at NAYRC in Eventing, the first being Andrea Gates (also from Kindred Spirits Stables).

After an extensive vet exam and mending an abscess from an errant shoe nail, we were cleared for competition. We journeyed to camp in Chicago to train with our NAYRC Coach, Becky Holder. Becky was a phenomenal coach and supporter. She brought to my attention small things to help both Fan and I and always had a compliment to share. "This is an extremely classy mare," she once said, "and you can see the two of you share a strong relationship." Becky also pointed out what a marvelous job had been done through the years managing Fan's health and competition schedule so that she could have such a fine career and that both of us had been wonderfully trained for our mission!

Then, off to Virginia! We put out a solid dressage test that was quiet and obedient, but lacking the suspension of most of the

"Athletes;" (Continued on page 24)

“Athletes;” (Continued from page 22)

other horses (not a function of training, but the build/breed of the horse). Next, we tackled the cross country course, adding no time or jump penalties to our score. It was plenty HOT, though Fan managed to come in with a temp of only 103 degrees, one of the lowest of the day! At the required vet inspection “jog up,” Fan was “sound as a dollar” and we were allowed to continue in the competition. In show jumping, Fan tapped the last rail of the last jump with her hind foot but no time penalties. Fan and I individually finished in 8th place out of 30 riders and our team finished with a Silver Medal! We were thrilled to have completed this grueling competition and honored to have been selected.



Hannah & “Fan” show great form in the show jump phase at the American Eventing Championships (AEC’s)

After two weeks off, we began to prep for the American Eventing Championships (AEC’s) held in Chicago. The week prior, I’d hyper-extended my right elbow and tore a ligament. After much debate, we decided to at least “try” to compete. I literally mounted Fan for the first time, at the horse park, the day before dressage. Once again, a respectable dressage test but Cross Country was another story. I re-injured my arm at jump 3 and this wonderful mare allowed me to set her up for most of the jumps with one arm and no arguments from her! Had it been any other horse, it just wouldn’t have happened. I thankfully had my support team to take Fan as we came through the finish flags and I “peeled” off Fan’s back in a heap. Never have I been in so much pain, and never have I felt closer to this horse. The next day in show jumping we dropped two rails in a combination, but still placed 8th in our nation!

We have one more competition this season, that being our Area Championships. Then, two months of rest before we start conditioning again for next year!

As you can imagine, the management and care of an 1100# athlete that doesn’t speak English takes daily commitment and years of detailed attention. But that attention and care have rewarded me (and all the others that have ridden Fan) with a willing, healthy, obedient and wonderful partner. Fan will compete next year at the intermediate level of competition and then will be retired and will become a mother and schoolmaster.

To my friend and amazing athletic partner, thanks Fan, it’s been a GREAT ride!!!!

