

Balancing

Amateur or professional? For some, that is an obvious decision; simply a lifestyle choice. However, there are challenges that go along with being an amateur rider. Join us as three amateurs discuss their own unique ways of balancing riding, work, budget, family and a personal life.

By Jeannie Blancq Putney

Adele Einhorn

Adele Einhorn has had an enviable show record as an amateur. For the past 11 years, she has also enjoyed a career in the horse industry as Skidmore College's director of special projects and executive director of the Skidmore College Saratoga Classic Horse Show.

It all started during a family vacation in Jamaica when she was 7 years old. Adele recalls winning a bareback donkey race on the beach. That turned into riding lessons, showing successfully as a junior, then riding on Skidmore's intercollegiate team. Since then, Adele has given up the sport several times. At one point, she moved to Denmark and gave up riding for nearly 12 years. When she came back to Skidmore, this time as an employee, the opportunity to ride again was presented to her.

"Cindy Ford, the director of riding at

Skidmore, said I should come ride, and I said 'No, let's go to lunch instead,'" Adele jokes. "She was kind enough to give me some horses to ride, and I started taking lessons. I went to a little bitty horse show, won one blue ribbon, and that's all it took; I was in."

In no time, Adele started competing regularly and decided to start chasing the Ariat Medal. Thanks to a special horse named Chambord, she was the first person to win the Ariat Masters award. "It looked like the Stanley Cup trophy to me," she says. "It was a real honor. In the standings, I was the number one rider—and I was one of the older ones at that time, as well." In 2001, Adele won the New England Adult Medal and then started competing as an amateur owner for a few years.

"I had a nice horse that I did very well on, but it came to the point where I had accomplished most everything I had hoped," she says. "I ended up selling my horse and opted to take a break from



JAMES LESLIE PARKER

Adele Einhorn on Matias at the Saratoga Horse Show

Act

riding.” Adele had just met her husband and decided to take up snowboarding and have a social life outside of the riding arena.

In 2007, Adele returned to the saddle after meeting Rob Bielefeld and Scott Fitton through the Skidmore College horse show. Rob and Scott told her she was too good an equestrian not to ride. “I went to Florida for a visit and ended up leasing a horse, showing with them, and had a ball,” she says. “I rode with both Rob and Scott this year, and Bobby and Christina from Quiet Hill Farm.” The plan was for Adele to show in Wellington last winter, but then her mother was diagnosed with cancer.

“You just never know what life throws at you,” she says. “You have to set your priorities, and sometimes riding and showing has to be at the bottom of the list. It can be work that gets in the way, or your back goes out, or a family member gets sick. You just have to deal with it as it comes. We don’t have an unlimited disposable income, so when I invest in owning a horse

again, I want to be able to commit the time and the energy needed to the sport.”

The key to having a full-time job and riding, according to Adele, is balance. “If you can’t ride five days a week, it is very important that you have someone you trust on your horse,” she notes. Whether or not you own a horse, Adele says that having a good professional who can prepare your horse is vital. “You don’t want to have anxiety if you’re going to horse

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shows. It should be about having fun,” she explains. “You want to be able to just get out there and focus on your ride and know your horse is prepared and quiet, and the best he can be. At this point in my riding career, having that peace of mind enables me to be able to balance everything else.”

Adele also feels that it’s important

not to put too much emphasis on winning. “It gets blown out of perspective,” she says. “Only one person at a time can win, and it’s okay if it’s not you. It’s more important for my trainer to tell me I rode beautifully and did a great job, or for the owner to say ‘You rode him great.’

“My husband says it costs about \$1,000 every time I sit in saddle, so if I’m not out there having fun, I should just get off,” she continues. “The times it stopped being fun for me are the times I walked away and took a break. For me, it is equally fun to watch others ride a horse of mine. Kristen Vale rode my horse Belgique a few years ago and won the World Championship Hunter Rider Adult Championship at Capital Challenge, and I never once said I wish it had been me. It’s the most humbling sport out there, and that is probably what keeps me coming back over and over again.”

Although she has a master’s degree in education and loves teaching, Adele doesn’t see herself as a professional riding coach or trainer. “I enjoy the sport from a different perspective,” she explains. “I like to have the balance between work and riding, and have the horses be my passion. If it were my job, I don’t think I would enjoy it as much.”

At the moment, Adele is horseless; but she says that her perfect horse is a chunky warmblood gelding, preferably bay. “My dream horse would be one [on which] I could wear the biggest pair of spurs they make and know it’ll only have one gear—slow. I have a penchant for lighting them up anyway; I’m very type ‘A’ and think I could get a dead horse to run.”

Kate Gibson

Amateur Kate Gibson came from a horsey family, so there is no doubt that she inherited what she affectionately terms “the horse disease.” When her parents met, the common denominator was that they both rode horses. Her dad grew up foxhunting in Texas and her mom in North Carolina. “They would

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—Kate Gibson

throw the four of us in the back seat of the station wagon and we’d go to random Texas horse shows,” Kate says. “With two girls, two boys and my parents showing, I don’t know how they did it. I don’t know how they kept all our clothes organized!”

Kate remembers riding with the Zimmerman family, close friends of her parents who she credits for truly bringing the hunter/jumper world to Texas. “Back then, there were only eight shows in the whole state of Texas,” she says. All four of the children in Kate’s family grew up riding and then quit when they headed to college. Since graduating, she says, all four have crept back into riding, along with their children.

The 60-acre Shadyside Farm in Magnolia, Texas, belongs to Kate and her husband Steve. It is home to some 18 horses, mostly belonging to the Gibson family. Mom Diana is 77 and still rides five days a week. “I can’t imagine what my mom would do if she couldn’t ride every day,” says Kate. “She’s tougher than all of us and gets mad if we give her something old to ride.”

Kate’s two daughters are juniors, her sister keeps two horses at the farm and her brothers both play a little bit of polo. Shadyside Farm is truly a family business. Without help from her family and farm manager Marie, Kate says she wouldn’t be able to ride, show and make it all work. “Marie runs the farm and is the whole reason I can do all of this,” Kate says. “She runs the show and makes it so that I can drive carpool, and then show up and ride.”

After getting her bachelor’s degree in architecture, Kate spent three years buying art and working with Sotheby’s. Then she slowly quit working, got married and became a mom, which she says made it easy to quit riding for a few years. At one point, however, she bought a young horse, trained it and sold it. After doing that a few times, it turned into finding horses for her many avid equestrian family members, and she got right back into the game. Kate credits her non-horsey husband for his support. “I am very fortunate to have my husband, who is very supportive,” she says. “Mostly he thinks if I took all of my attention and focused it on him he’d be tortured, so he’s happy I have this outlet.”

Now Kate is actively showing in the amateur-owner hunters while her sister has been doing the adults for three years. Kate was champion in the amateur owners 36 and over at the 2006 Capital Challenge, and won the \$2,500 WCHR Amateur-Owner Challenge this year. The family trains with Peter Pletcher, who Kate and sister Laura grew up with and who now operates just down the road from them. “We try to keep it fun,” Kate says. “Peter is pretty good about laughing about it when something goes awry, and always [ends] on a good note.”

The secret to success and happiness in the world of horses is learning to laugh, Kate says. “You just sort of laugh a lot and don’t micromanage if it doesn’t go right,” she says. “You just have to say to yourself ‘It could have been worse.’”



COURTESY OF KATE GIBSON

From left: Diana Hobby, Marie Thyssen, Kate Gibson, Carson Gibson, Grace Hobby, Caroline Gibson and Laura Beckworth share the work—and fun—at Shadyside Farm.

“Do your best to be associated with good, decent, hard-working people, because the only shot you have at balancing it all is to have good help.”

—John Ingram

and keep it all in perspective. You laugh even harder when a hurricane hits you, and you’re trying to leave and don’t have any power.”

Kate says there was never a question in her mind about whether or not to go “pro.” “To be a professional who is married is hard,” she explains. “I totally admire the people who can do all of that. When you grow up riding with Peter Pletcher, you’re pretty sure you should stay an amateur and let him be the professional; he can do it so much better.”

Budgeting and finding balance are Kate’s biggest daily challenges. Between finding the right horses for her daughters, her niece, her sister and sometimes herself to compete, there is a lot of juggling to be done. Ten of the horses at Shadyside Farm are shown between the five ladies. There are a few boarders that trail ride, and Kate’s brothers keep their polo ponies at the ranch in their off season. Most of the horses on the farm are ones that Kate’s mom can enjoy, as well. “They are all pretty much family horses that all of us have shown,” she says. “You get very personally attached to a horse you compete and then your daughter shows. You do get those favorites that you keep forever. Horses are great for the family. You can do it when you’re five or 77. We’re fortunate to have it as a family disease.”

Kate’s daughters have grown up competing against each other, just as she and her sister did. “They’ve handled it well because they don’t know any different,” Kate says. “They are always happy for each other. My mom is just happy when we all make it around.”



PENNINGTON GALLERIES

John Ingram’s love of animals brought him back to the horse world as an adult.

The key to enjoying being an amateur, according to Kate, is a balanced lifestyle. “The secret to life in general is balancing things you love with work and the other things you have to do.”

John Ingram

John Ingram fell into horses when an aunt got him started riding at the tender age of 4. “We did English riding on little fat ponies,” he says. “I grew up showing with my cousins. We used to go foxhunting; my uncle was Master of Foxhounds. Today you have special horses for special functions. Back then, you had a pony and you showed it, foxhunted with it and played cowboys and Indians on it.”

Growing up, John had a passion for golf, tennis and horses, and liked them all so much that he couldn’t give one up for very long. He entered the hunter-jumper world at the age of 16 when he began riding with Otis Brown, whom he credits with really teaching him how to ride. He

continued to ride throughout college but quit during business school and didn’t sit on a horse for seven years until his older brother convinced him to try polo—and then he was hooked. “I always thought that I would have it as a hobby in some shape or form, and it has taken multiple shapes and forms,” he explains.

When John’s wife and two children became more and more interested in hunters and jumpers, he took the chance to re-enter the world of jumping. “It was not a hard transition to move back into the hunter-jumper world, but I did have to watch that my leg doesn’t swing around too much,” John jokes. “It’s something we can do as a family unit. As much as I enjoyed polo, it was one more thing pulling me away from my family.” Currently John rides hunters with Tom Wright and jumpers with Joe Fargis. Wife Stephanie does the adult hunters and his 12-year-old daughter “would rather ride ponies than take a breath.” John adds that his son is quite athletic



and enjoys his ponies as well.

Being an amateur is a life John enjoys, but he says it is hard to juggle. “My best advice is do your best to be associated with good, decent, hard-working people, because the only shot you have at balancing it all is to have good help. I really depend on a lot of people to make it possible, including a wonderful horse manager who keeps the horses in excellent shape.”

What keeps John in the saddle is the difference between riding and his day job. “Part of what I like is the balance change from other things I do,” he says. “I love work, but it’s such a nice change from work. I enjoy the difference and the change. It works for me.” What keeps John involved with horses is the love of animals. “The feel that you get when you’re really ‘in sync’ with your horse, whether it be a hunter course, a jumper course or on a polo field, is second to none,” he maintains. “When you know your horse is really giving you his best, it all clicks. It’s magic and it’s special.”

John also enjoys horses because of the challenges they create. “It depends on the week what horse you click with,” he says. “They never seem to be the same, and that’s the challenge of it all. It’s not a golf club that you put in the closet and it comes out the same every day. Horses are different every time they leave the stall.”

Life as an amateur suits John just fine. He says there haven’t been a lot of significant wins that stand out in his mind, but that he has always been a “fairly decent” rider who enjoys the horse show environment. “My accomplishments at this point are about ‘personal best,’ not whether or not I can take the world by storm.”

Writer Jeannie Blancq Putney has been working in marketing and communications for more than a decade. She has also covered the Federation Equestre Internationale World Equestrian Games for the United States Equestrian Federation and writes for several equestrian publications.

