



*Sporthorse Disciplines
and the American Saddlebred*
-THE NATURAL FIT

BY JULIE LYNN ANDREW

From the very first, the American Saddlebred has done his own proud. Whether carrying him into battle, across a plantation in style, or into a show ring, the breed's athleticism and beauty has been a constant. From Traveler to Fury, Flicka to My My, Appomatox to Hollywood, and back to Louisville, the Saddlebred has risen to every occasion, and filled every bill. Anyone who is an aficionado of the breed is familiar with all of the divisions in which American Saddlebreds traditionally are shown, but the time has come to recognize the areas in which the breed has excelled unheralded for years; the Sporhorse disciplines.

As the Europeans, with their Warmbloods of divergent, yet essentially similar, bloodlines came to the fore in the Olympic Games, horses like Jacks or Better, an Olympic Show Jumper for the U.S., winner at Aachen in 1964, and an American Saddlebred, and American Lady, an American Saddlebred Olympic Dressage horse, were left to history, and the United States imported European Warmbloods of every type— from German Holstieners, Hannoverians and Trakheners, to the Dutch, Danish, and Swedish Warmblood, and more. While the Europeans had been busily breeding these horses for sport, the Americans had primarily ridden Cavalry remounts into the international scene. In comparison to the Europeans, the American breeding effort to produce horses of international caliber for the Sporhorse

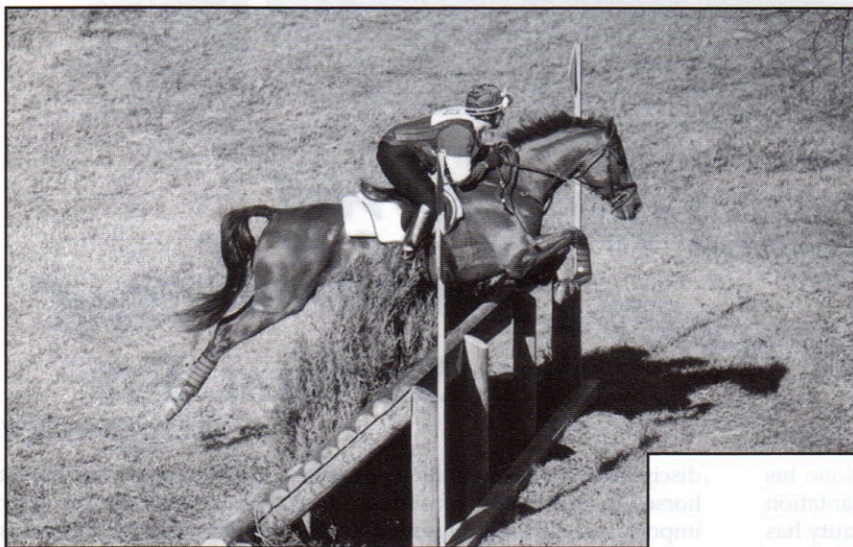
disciplines was practically nonexistent. So, we began to import horses, in an attempt to fast track our competitive efforts. The early imports were usually larger horses, of colder blood, with enormous bone and girth, but as time has passed, these heavier horses have given way to a lighter type. Just as the American Saddlebred is descended largely from Thoroughbred blood, more Thoroughbred has been infused into these Warmblood breeds, making them, amongst other things, more manageable as competitive ladies mounts. The door is opening again to competitive quality Sporhorse prospects, with movement and temperaments that suit the Amateur rider of today. What is more to the point, is that a marketplace exists, of enormous stature and potential, for the American Saddlebred to gain visibility and prominence. The disciplines which are usually accepted under the Sporhorse heading include those which are also known as the Olympic disciplines—Show Jumping, Eventing (specifically three day at the Olympic level), Competitive Driving, Endurance, Dressage and most recently, Reining. Let's take a look at these disciplines.

Show Jumping, or "Grand Prix," after the French words for "richest or largest prize," began in Paris in 1866. By 1906, Grand Prix jumping had been proposed as a permanent part of the Olympic Games. For this competition, the horses must negotiate a

— BIOGRAPHY —

From Chester Springs Pennsylvania, horsewoman Julie Lynn Andrew is Director of Sales and Marketing for a builder/developer in the Main Line area. Her passions revolve around her American Saddlebred Sporhorses, and Dressage. Her experience in horses includes showing American Saddlebred Showhorses, competing horses of all breeds as Dressage horses, the administration of a nationally prominent Equestrian Center, and breeding, training and competing American Saddlebreds for Dressage. She is uniquely qualified, and quite devoted, to acting as a major activist in bringing the American Saddlebred to national prominence as a major force to be reckoned with in the Sporhorse world.

course of 15-20 obstacles, with "faults" (penalty points) assigned for reducing the height of a fence, not clearing the water, or exceeding the time allowed. Course designers provide challenging courses of colorful and creative obstacles ranging in height from four feet to five feet six inches, in similar widths, with carefully calculated distances. Riders must determine how best to get around these courses with their horse, hoping for that elusive "clear round" - in the fastest time. According to Champ Hough, a hunter jumper trainer of National prominence, in the 1950s and 60s, many of the best show jumpers in the country were American Saddlebreds, usually passed off as another breed, or stated to be of unknown origin. The Saddlebred, with fabulously powerful hindquarters, front end flexibility and can do attitude is still out there, and still usually anonymous.



Endurance riding has been with us for centuries, from the Bedouins and their Arabians, crossing long expanses of desert. In modern times, the Cavalry and Pony Express trained horses for long distances, working on preparing their horses for maximum speed for extended periods of time. The modern endurance horse must travel at least 50 miles a day in competition, while maintaining optimum health and condition. Horses are examined by veterinarians at checkpoints throughout the course, and again at the finish, for heart rate, soundness, and dehydration. Courses may include any kind of terrain, from mountains to desert spaces. The goal is to arrive at the finish line first, with your horse in excellent condition. The motto of the endurance rider is "to finish is to win," as no minimum time is established. While traditionally Arabs and horses of Arabian cross are at the top of this sport, American Saddlebreds are great partners, and horses such as Squeezable (Squeeze Play x Wild Loveliness), owned by Mary E. McDevitt, have had great achievements.

The art of Reining is the newest development in the world of Olympic disciplines. Reining horses may be of any age, breed and color. Competitors run one of a proscribed group of patterns, which integrate required movements. These movements include rollbacks, flying changes, 360-degree spins, done in place, large and small circles, and of course the dramatic and exciting sliding stops. The freestyle competition, in which specified movements are incorporated into a performance that is set to music, is a huge crowd-pleaser. Horses are scored on a point basis, from zero to infinity, with 70 being an average score. The competitors are

evaluated for attitude, fitness, quickness, smoothness and authority, as they work through their patterns. Judges may choose to fault a movement with a deduction of 1 point on each of the maneuvers. The American Quarter Horse has taken the sport as its own, with few other breeds matching the Quarter Horse's natural talent for the discipline. While many American Saddlebreds have made great ranch horses, some having a good bit of "cow" on them (the ability to read a cow, and direct it), we'll have to wait and see if an American Saddlebred can rise to the top of this field.

Combined Driving takes us back to a time when the horse was our means of transportation. Throughout history, horses in harness have gone to war, plowed our fields, pulled our ferries, trolleys, and dressed up to pull the carriage on Sundays. The marathon vehicles are as state of the art as a racing bike- built to negotiate challenging cross-country courses at speed, and stay in one piece. The sport of Combined Driving demands a horse to be obedient, brilliant, supple and fit. There are three phases—the Dressage test, Marathon, and the Cones course. In the Dressage phase, the horses complete a set pattern, showing their ability to perform brilliant movement, with balance, cadence and expression, and correct and accurate transitions. Elegant turnout is essential, with horse, driver, carriage and harness gleaming with hard work and preparation. In the Marathon phase, the courage and agility, as well as accuracy and ability, of the horse and driver are tested over a challenging course, at speed. There are two types of Marathons—a three section and a five. The three sections consist of a trot section, followed by a walk section, then the cross-country. The five-section



Marathon adds an additional trot and walk section before the cross-country. A stalwart navigator rides on the back of the Marathon vehicle with the driver, helping to balance the vehicle and guide the driver as they negotiate the course at speed, judged on the time they take to complete the course. The partnership between driver and horse is tested here, along with the strength of their vehicle and harness, making for an exciting competition. The final phase, the Cones Course, challenges the stamina, coordination, precision and timing of these teams. Each team must negotiate a course of cones with balls sitting on top, at specified distances (ten to twenty inches wider than the wheel track, depending on the division) and once again, against the clock. Time is added for each ball that is knocked down as the carriage passes too close to a cone, and the competitor with the lowest score, over

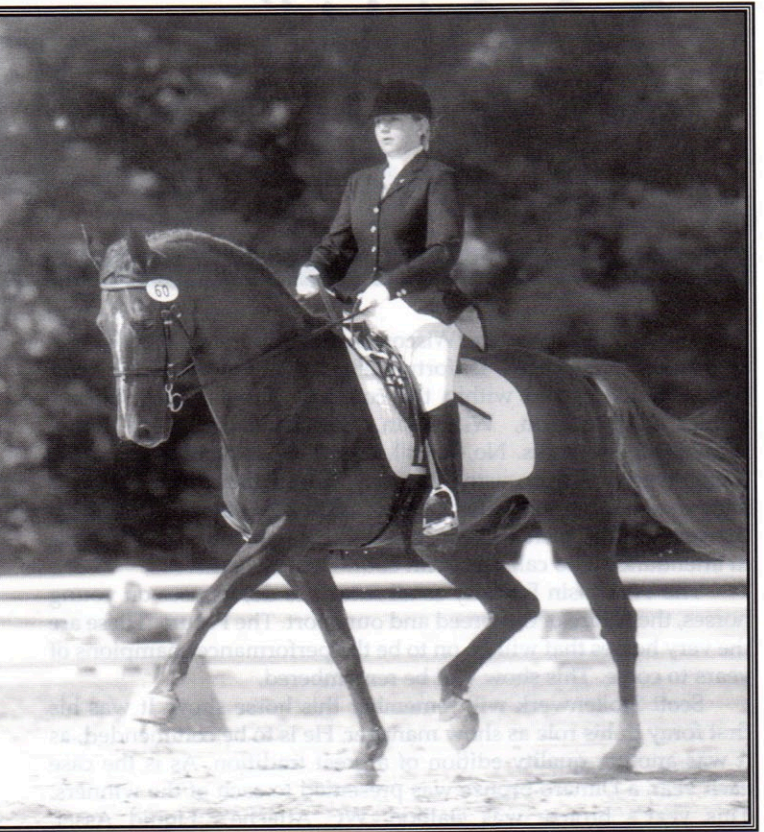
Karen Dennis of Greensburg, North Carolina, and her spectacular Dressage partner, Lyric, registered as Country's Yo-yo, and known as Yo-yo, are taking the Dressage world by storm. In October 2000, they captured the American Bankers Insurance Finals in Maryland. Like many riders who have not ridden or owned American Saddlebreds, Karen was skeptical about meeting Yo-yo, but he quickly won her over. In addition to his size-17.2 hands, wonderful temperament, and fabulous movement, Yo-yo managed to stay under Karen when he spooked, and a loose girth almost led to a fall.

"Yo-yo has never let me fall. He is the sweetest thing, and he always wants to please. I have had three trainers, and they just cannot believe this horse's canter. I had thought Saddlebreds were psychotic, pacey horses until I found Yo-yo," Karen explains.

Karen, working with her instructor Angela Halleran of Flintridge Farm in Reidsville, North Carolina, is preparing Yo-yo to compete at third and fourth level this year.

"We won't be showing until May, because we have to get our changes right," says Karen.

Good luck to Karen and Yo-yo, a shining ambassador of the American Saddlebred.



Sporhorse Disciplines continued

the sections, is declared the winner. The American Saddlebred has the opportunity to truly shine here, with their wonderful movement, gameness, and flexibility.

Like Competitive Driving, Eventing is also a competition of phases. Introduced at the 1912 games in Stockholm, Eventing was originally considered the ultimate challenge for the military charger. In fact, non-military personnel were not permitted to compete in the Olympics in this discipline until 1956; women were banned until 1964. Eventing requires the horse and rider to compete as a team in three phases—Dressage, Cross Country, and Stadium Jumping. With its origins in the military, it is easy to understand the function of the phases. Dressage demonstrates the harmony, obedience and correct physical development of the horse. Riders must complete a proscribed test of required movements, each having a maximum value of ten points. There are also the collective marks for rider position, submission of the horse, impulsion and quality of the paces. Deductions are made on each movement, as compared to the required ideal for that particular movement. The Speed and Endurance portion of the test at the Olympic level is comprised of four parts. The first is short roads and tracks, followed by the second, steeplechase, which is in turn followed by the third, long roads and tracks. There is a veterinary check at this point, which is mandatory, and lasts ten minutes. The final portion of this section is the cross country course, which is made up of 24 to 36 fixed and solid obstacles, which may be four feet high, and ten feet wide (at the base) some of which may require multiple jumping efforts as part of the same obstacle. This phase of the competition is also judged on points, with penalties for excess time, refusals, and run-outs. The final phase, Stadium Jumping, requires a horse to negotiate a colorful course of fences differing in height, width and technicality, in the arena. A knocked down rail adds points to the score. At the end of this phase, points are tallied, and the horse with the lowest score wins. In the United States, Eventing offers many different divisions, from one-day events, at Baby

Novice level, with smaller fences, fewer phases, and inviting cross-country courses. Many Saddlebreds are competing, and winning at all levels of this sport.

Finally, we have Dressage. Dressage is the single fastest growing Sporhorse discipline today. The United States Dressage Federation reports that from 1990 to 2000, their membership grew a remarkable 104%! When you consider that this is only for those people who elect to join the USDF, as opposed to those people with horses in their backyards, and in boarding barns across the United States, who are dabbling in Dressage, this discipline offers a truly outstanding venue for the American Saddlebred to excel, and a phenomenal marketing opportunity for the breed. The word Dressage comes to us from the French "dresser," which simply means "to train." It is a sport which is pyramidal in its learning structure; laying a foundation in the lower levels that builds and confirms an athlete for the upper level work of Grand Prix, or Olympic level, Dressage. Dressage has at its roots, the classic Greek horsemanship. As with Eventing, at the Olympic level, Dressage was originally exclusively for Military personnel. First introduced at the Olympics in 1912, Dressage was not opened up to civilians for another 40 years. Today, civilians are the dominant force in Dressage.

Finding an American Saddlebred suited for these disciplines isn't always an easy task. Educating the breeders and trainers of these wonderful horses will open the doors to sport horse devotees wishing to find high quality prospects that have not had show horse training. This allows for a blank slate with which to work, rather than reschooling, always the better choice, regardless of the discipline. Fox hunting, polo, pleasure riding and driving—the Saddlebred is now, and has always been the best partner and friend a horseperson can choose to have.

