

Eventer On The Rise Horse People: Robyn Fisher

by Donna Gulnac

Robyn Fisher may not have the same name recognition in the eventing world as Kim Severson or Phillip Dutton, but given her drive, talent and terrific horses, odds are this will soon change. Robyn was a competitor at the Rolex Kentucky CCI**** this year where veteran international rider and coach Jimmy Wofford predicted she would win his "Whodat?" award for being "the least known rider who places the best at their first attempt at Rolex." (*California Riding Magazine*, June 2005) As it turned out, Robyn and her horse Le Samurai had a fall on the cross-country course so did not complete Rolex, but the veterans in the sport are clearly taking notice.

Robyn believes that Wofford singled her out for this "award" based on her performance at the Georgia CIC*** a few weeks before the Kentucky event, where she had ridden along with many other Rolex participants. He was stationed at the most difficult obstacle on that cross-country course, as was Captain Mark Phillips, and witnessed her easily guiding Samurai through the trickier "direct route:" a gutsy move taken by only one other rider. Even fellow competitor Darren Chiacchia made a point to let her know how impressed he was by this.

Robyn, now 25, says her love affair with horses started at a very young age. At 18 months old, Robyn's parents took her to a photographer to have pictures taken on what was supposed to be a rocking chair; but turned out to be a rocking horse. Robyn claims that she insisted on riding the toy horse for six hours. Her involvement with real horses, however, began as a combination of serendipity and competition with her older sister, Casey. Robyn grew up in Rohnert Park (near Santa Rosa) where a local barn, Mountain View

Stables, had left a flyer on their door step advertising riding lessons. Casey decided that she wanted to start riding. The then 6 year old Robyn was determined to be just like her big sister. Robyn remembers, "The barn was a chicken coop and the arena was a bull pen." The horse she rode was a big bay mare named Tandy and the lessons cost \$8 per

From ages 12 through 15, Robyn trained at Oakridge and then went to Shirley Aronson's barn where she was allowed to work off the board of her horses. Robyn's father had told her she could have as many horses as she could work off. Throughout high school Robyn proved just how smart, energetic and

ambitious she was by going to the gym in the mornings, school during the day and then to work and ride after school. In 1998, Robyn was Area VI Young Rider Champion and graduated from high school with a 3.86 GPA.

Sparky Enters The Picture

After high school, Robyn went south to Mill Creek

Equestrian Center in Topanga to teach for the summer before beginning college at U.C. Davis, where she majored in English and minored in Equine Enterprise. While at Davis, Robyn trained with

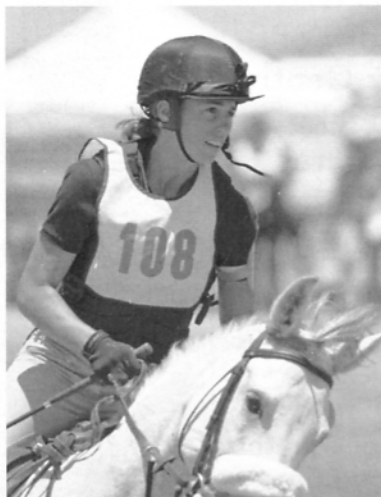


Photo: © Bob Metzger



On course at Rolex, April 2005.

Photo: © Michelle C. Dunn



Keeping the fans happy in France, May 2004.



The dressage phase during the CCI*** in France, May 2004.

hour. The once-a-week lessons quickly increased to twice-a-week and so on. Casey stopped riding after about six years, but Robyn became increasingly more serious about horses.

By the time she was 8, Robyn owned her first horse: a former barrel racer Quarter Horse named Toby Tyler that her family bought for \$900. He had no english training, but she ended up riding him as a hunter/jumper for two years. At 10, she competed in her first mock Three-Day Event at Silver Lining Stables and was bucked off after the second fence. Her trainer at the time, Bea Quinn, was training with well-known eventing rider and trainer Yves Sauvignon at Oakridge Stables in Santa Rosa, and she brought a little of the eventing world to her own barn.

Valerie Bertoli and it's through Valerie that she found Le Samurai or "Sparky" as Robyn affectionately calls him. Sparky, a Holsteiner gelding, was not quite 4 and had been returned to Valerie for retraining because he had become hard to handle. Valerie assigned Robyn to this task. Robyn swears that "from the moment I got on him, I knew I had to have him," in spite of the fact that he bucked her off the first time she jumped him. Robyn felt they "just clicked." In 1999, she bought Sparky, against the advice of her trainer and her friends.

In 2000, after two years of college, Robyn's aspirations to compete at the national and international levels prevailed and she decided to take a planned educational leave to focus on her riding. At Valerie's urging, she went

<< to France to train with 1996 French eventing team member Jacques Dulcy. While in France, she competed all over Europe, including CIC* and ** in Germany, France and Italy. After two years in France, Robyn decided she wanted to come home and finish her degree at U.C. Davis. In typical Robyn Fisher style, she continued competing, yet finished college within a year and a half of her return, taking only three and a half years total to earn her B.A.

It was in 2003 that Robyn began competing Sparky at the Advanced level after winning the CIC** at Galway Downs in March. Robyn had also returned to Oakridge to train once she finished school. Robyn had her first Advanced level win at Copper Meadows in September of 2003 and then won the CCI** at Galway Downs in October. In March of 2004, Robyn and Samurai made a bit of splash by winning the Galway Downs International Horse Trials CIC*** and then by placing 10th in the CCI*** in Saumur, France.

By this time, she had caught the attention of the coach of the U.S. Eventing Team, Captain Mark Phillips. Robyn was then long-listed for the Olympic team in 2004, but was not selected because she lacked experience. Being on the long list also meant that she was eligible to participate in the special clinics offered exclusively to these USET hopefuls. In addition, Robyn was awarded the Amanda Warrington Fund Grant in 2004: a \$5,000 grant to help offset riding expenses, which is given to a rider who is participating in the USEF Eventing Developing Rider program (coached by Kim Severson.)

This July, Robyn won the CIC*** at the "The Event at Rebecca Farm" in Montana, which helped to qualify her to become one of five Americans eligible to compete in the World Cup of Eventing in Malmo, Sweden held in August of this year. (Robyn was the highest placed American, in ninth place, after dressage at the World Cup, but decided to retire during the cross country phase.) In November 2004, Robyn and Le Samurai were once again selected for the USET long list: this time for the 2006 World Equestrian Games in Aachen, Germany.

Passing It On

While competing at the Twin Rivers Horse Trials in Paso Robles last summer, Robyn ran into Mill Creek owner Cory Walkey. Robyn recounts, "Cory jokingly made me a job offer

and I jokingly accepted. Then we looked at each other and realized we could both be serious." Robyn began teaching and training again at Mill Creek Equestrian Center in September 2004.

Robyn has been proving herself as an instructor and horse trainer at Mill Creek. Cory says that Robyn is a tremendous asset to her establishment and is exceedingly proud and delighted to have Robyn on her staff. Robyn



Keeping their eyes on the prize: Robyn and Le Samurai clear a large table in Saumur, France, May 2004.



Photo: © Bob Metzger

is already cherished by her students there and is missed when she is off competing. Student Beth Cannon appreciates Robyn's "wonderful energy and enthusiasm." As a teacher, Robyn hopes to "give everyone as much knowledge as has been given to me over the years."

Robyn has managed to earn the respect of her colleagues as well. Eva Maria Härdin, who runs the school horse program at Mill Creek, graduated from Stromsolm Academy, Sweden's prestigious school for dressage instructors. She worked with Robyn on her dressage before the World Cup this summer. Eva Maria states that "it is very stimulating to have such a nice student to work with: she is my best and brightest. She is hard working, never complains and always comes back for more." Eva Maria adds in complete seriousness, "and she has the most talented and beautiful horses in all of the eventing world."

Robyn has her own up-and-comer in

her mare Lady Calido, a stunning 9 year old Holsteiner. Robyn first saw her in May of 2003 when Cali was a brood mare. Robyn wanted to buy her then, but couldn't afford her until June of 2004. Robyn has been competing Cali at the Preliminary level this year and wins her division more often than not. Cali is currently the top Preliminary horse in California and, at the time of this writing, is tied for the number one eventing mare in the country. When asked

to compare her two horses, she says:

"Cali is like driving a nice Jag or some other luxury car with speed; Sparky can either be a little Ferrari or a semi-truck, depending on his mood."

Robyn plans to have Cali going Advanced by the end of 2006 and then hopes to qualify her for the Pan American Games in 2007. She also aims to qualify both of her horses for the 2008 Olympic Games in Hong Kong. These goals seem well within her reach.

"All Robyn needs is more miles; she really feels it, but just needs the tiniest bit of structure to bring her to the next level," says Eva Maria. "Once her knowledge matches up with her huge talent, she will be unbeatable."

Author Donna Gulnac is an amateur eventing rider at Mill Creek Equestrian Center in the Los Angeles area's Topanga Canyon.



Showing great form during show jumping at the CCI***, Saumur, France.

Editor's Note: Congratulations to Robyn and Le Samurai! Just as this magazine was going to press, October 14-16, Robyn and Sparky finished fourth in the CCI*** During the Fair Hill International CCI*** Three-Day Event in Fair Hill Maryland. Leading after the dressage phase, Robyn and Sparky finished with 52.00 penalties after the show jumping, and Robyn was honored with the USEF

Owner-Rider Eventing Championship as the top finishing American owner-rider.

